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City schools group sets priorities

By PAMALA J. WILLIAMS
Times Staff Writer

The establishment of grade-level, performance-based expectations should be the top priority for Valdosta City Schools, a strategic planning group decided Tuesday.

School Superintendent Dr. Gary Walker asked the group composed of parents, business people and retired educators to set a list of priorities during a meeting Tuesday night.

He plans to take that priority list back to system principals Thursday and then they will develop a plan of action.

From a list of directives and objectives, the group was asked to come up with five priorities.

Following the setting of grade-level, performance-based expectations, it selected the establishment of standards of school climate that enhance student achievement; to provide support services for students with identified special needs (including at-risk, special education, and gifted

and talented students); to maximize technology in instruction and classroom management; and to develop and implement programs for the development of life skills of students and teachers. These include self-discipline, leadership, teamwork, race relations, conflict resolution, work ethic, problem solving, morals, goal setting, attitude, and verbal skills.

During the session, Walker also spent time discussing the facilitator model with the group, an approach to gifted education implemented at the high school last year. The model will be put into practice in middle schools this year.

"We have a lot of kids who are interested in things other than social studies," Walker explained. Under the facilitator model, gifted students would work out an independent program in their particular area of interest. The facilitator will work with teachers to develop projects and find times for the students to work on those projects.

BOE attorney holding interviews in ongoing investigation

By PAMALA J. WILLIAMS
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — An investigation of the Valdosta City Schools has gotten off to a good start, attorney Gary Moser said Wednesday.

In conducting a board-ordered query looking into the problems that have dogged the city school system this past year, Moser said he has held interviews for the past two days.

Along with Paul Chambers, a retired superintendent recom-

mended by the Professional Practices Commission to help with the local probe, Moser is conducting deposition-style interviews with those who have specific grievances or identifiable problems. Moser said he has called in system employees at random and also has scheduled interviews with members of the community who have called and asked to participate.

"We have had excellent response," Moser said. "More and more people are calling."

In order to be able to schedule all who want to participate, Moser has set a noon Monday (July 7) deadline to call his office and schedule an appointment. Interviews can be scheduled during normal business hours by calling 244-1527.

Moser is asking those who have already been interviewed not to discuss what was said until after he has had time to compile his full report. That report will contain word-for-word transcriptions of all interviews and will be presented to the board and the

public as a whole document, he said.

Interviews were conducted Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, Moser said, and will resume after the holiday on Monday.

"We hope to wind this up by (July 13)," Moser said. "But we're still scheduling in people who want to talk to us."

Moser said that Georgia Association of Educators attor-

ney John Bennett has attended many of the sessions in an advisory capacity and that interviews are ranging from 30 to 45 minutes in length.

BOE has responsibility to parents

DEAR EDITOR:

As a parent, PTO board member with Sallas Mahone and Valdosta Middle, and CPIE Partner of the Valdosta City School System, I am appalled with the allegations made against Dr. Gary Walker.

I have seen teachers and parents faced with major decisions concerning their continued support for the Valdosta City Schools. Good parents and teachers are leaving the school system seeking better opportunities to provide quality educational needs for the children of Valdosta.

Gifted students are purposely being denied the challenge to their fullest potential. Teachers are being told to do the impossible task of teaching numerous levels in one classroom. To increase learning abilities of students, they need to be nurtured in an environment based on their needs, as an individual student.

It seems that the board members and superintendent have been irresponsible to the wishes of the parents. Together parents, teachers, and administrators should and need to work side by side to provide a good quality education for every student in the Valdosta City School System.

The communication avenue from the superintendent to the parents and teachers is one that has been blocked by poor management, misinformation and tactics to degrade our school system. This community has worked hard together for many years to establish excellent criteria for all students.

We need to look at the overall needs of the students and not discriminate against any. However, we do not need to provide a challenge to each and every student as an individual to achieve at their full potential. The board needs to strive to achieve a level of responsibility to the parents and voters of the Valdosta City School System that is accurate and fair to all concerned.

I am pleased that an investigation is ongoing to establish fault. I believe this is a step in the right direction. I can only hope your findings will be enforced, accordingly.

**Charlene Davis
Valdosta**

VDT July 3, 1997

City school investment not 'paying off'

DEAR EDITOR:

As a tax-paying citizen of Valdosta and Lowndes County, I expect a certain "return" on my investment I'm making into our school systems. Much to my disappointment, though, my investment did not "pay off" this past school year. In fact, I may have even suffered a loss! But more devastating than my loss, is the loss suffered by my son Daniel, and his fellow classmates at West Gordon Elementary School.

Aahh...West Gordon...the school everyone's surely tired of hearing about in the superintendent's office. Quite frankly, though, this has been a horrible year for the majority of the student body at this school — not to mention the teachers. In a recent conversation surrounding the current school year, several individuals commented that they had not heard one good thing said about West Gordon from any parent! That's quite a testimony to the quality — or lack thereof — of the education our children are receiving at this school.

We entered the school year on a fairly positive note, as we had initially heard some good things about West Gordon. But, within a few weeks, our initial hopes for a fun and exciting year had all but disappeared. With the leveling system removed, the learning environment has been less than adequate for the students who come to school to learn and for the teachers who strive to make a difference in their lives. The classroom has become a center of chaos; not every once-in-awhile, not occasionally, but almost on a daily basis. Mainstreaming the behavior disordered children IS NOT WORKING! For a school that requires its teachers to adhere to an extremely rigid schedule, maybe you should take a close look at the amount of time — often an hour or more per incident — that is spent on a daily basis attempting to maintain order following a fight or confrontation. Just the other day, my son was hit in the back of his head with a book. Yes, it was one of the more behaviorally disordered children in the class who inflicted the blow and set off a whirlwind of chaos and disruption for nearly an hour. Incidents

like this are not uncommon, and often of the degree that whole groups of students must be sent to alert Dr. Dowling while the teacher struggles with the culprit. It simply is not fair for the "law abiding" students to be asked to put up with this. And as a parent who is investing time, money and ultimately my child, into this system, I expect nothing but the best possible education and learning environment for my child.

I could continue to site numerous incidents that have occurred throughout the school year — and most could have been prevented — but I don't want to lose sight of why this letter is being written. Bottom line...something **MUST** be done to improve the conditions at West Gordon Elementary School. And it can't be a 3-yr plan, a 5-yr plan or a 10-yr plan; it must be a **NOW** plan, so that our children are not forced to endure a similar school year in 1997 and '98! As a parent and citizen, I fully intend to let this letter mark the beginning of my fight to see that my child receives the best education possible from the public school system of Valdosta. And if that means being in the principal's office or the superintendent's office on a weekly basis, then so-be-it. If a PTO board is being formed for

the upcoming school year — or focus groups plan to address the situation — then I would appreciate the opportunity to serve in that capacity.

Let us not ever forget the reason why schools exist and teachers teach...the children! The learner and his or her needs should be the center of our attention!

Wesley Force
Valdosta

WT 7-4-97

VDT 7-10-77

Officials shouldn't bow to special interests

DEAR EDITOR:

The unanimous decision by the city Board of Education to conduct a carefully controlled internal investigation of the controversy generated by their contract-tenured chief executive officer is a cleverly contrived effort to cover their chagrin at having lost sight of their responsibilities for directing policy implementation.

Many years ago, the city council recognized the over-zealousness of a city manager who took it on himself to act independently of the governing body to which he was accountable.

Because he served at the will of the council instead of by contract, he was given the opportunity to resign his post. Should not all appointed executive officers be similarly treated?

When an elected body like a school board, city council or county commission routinely gives a rubber stamp approval to an executive officer's operations, it may be time to clean house of those incumbents. We know it can be done. We have seen it happen. Will we do this again?

If a grievance policy makes a superior official the sole judge of how grievances against him can be aired, to what recourse do the aggrieved persons have, except to appeal to higher authority or to the courts in the absence of a right to protest except through channels?

Perhaps we are finally recognizing that we the people want elected officials who concern themselves with their obligation to represent those who put them in office. Special interest demands and self-interest must never be motivating factors in those chosen to run our government affairs.

William M. Eanes
Valdosta

Does Valdosta Middle School discriminate?

■ Federal investigation seeks to determine whether classes are grouped by ability or by race

■ related story, page 3-A

By PAMALA J. WILLIAMS
Times Staff Writer

Are students at Valdosta Middle School being segregated by race instead of ability?

That's a question the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) is attempting to answer.

This fall, two of Valdosta's brightest academic stars — minority women who excelled in all areas, but have chosen to pursue scientific careers — head to Ivy League campuses. Ironically, during that same time period, a federal agency is expected to be completing a report looking into the under-representation of minorities in advanced science and math classes.

The OCR currently is conducting a compliance review at Valdosta Middle School. The review, which began March 15, is specifically probing the under-representation of minorities in advanced math and science classes, spokesman Roger Murphy said. Authorities are also examining whether VMS is practicing "within-school segregation" — situations where classes have been grouped not by ability, but by race.

The OCR first became interested in Valdosta Middle School after data sent to them by the state Department of Education sent up "red flags," Murphy said.

"It was based on that data that we selected that school," he explained.

The OCR's review is focusing solely on Valdosta Middle School. Murphy said the average length of a review is 135 days. Originally, two other schools, West Gordon Elementary and S.L. Mason Elementary, were targeted for reviews but were cleared after a site visit, according to Assistant Superintendent Sam Allen.

Some members of Valdosta's black community contend the problem of racial inequality is spread throughout the system and not just at one of the system's two middle schools. A report compiled by Project Change in June 1995 supports that claim.

According to system-wide information found in Valdosta's "Georgia Department of Education Report Card" and in school enrollment figures, the system's total population is 66 percent black (5,043) and 31 percent white (2,341).

■ Student failure rates don't mirror those population rates as 91 percent (374) of all students held back during the 1995-96 school year were black and 7.3 percent (30) were white.

■ Fifty-four percent (181) of the 1996 graduates were black, yet only 39 of those students received college preparatory diplomas. Twenty-one black students received diplomas with both college prep and vocational endorsements, while an additional 18 received college prep endorsements.

■ Of the 140 white graduates, 37 received diplomas with both the college prep and vocational endorsements, while 56 received college prep endorsements.

■ The largest group of diplomas received by the 1996 graduating class (77), went to black students earning a general high school diploma. Among white graduates, only 17 general diplomas were awarded.

■ Black graduates received 58 diplomas with vocational endorsements while the same diploma was awarded to 28 white graduates.

Alma Williams, a former school board member, claims the Valdosta system does not provide "equal opportunities and access" to black and poor white students.

Another concerned parent, Mary Willis, said the inequities in the system are visible to anyone walking the halls at VMS.

"During one visit to that school, I noticed almost solidly white classes," Willis said.

She also said her children and others know what it means to be called one of the "Bo Kids," an on-campus name she claims students use that is short for "Dumbo" and is applied to students in majority-black, low-level classes.

"My oldest daughter used to use that as a threat to get her younger sister to get focused on her schoolwork," Willis said. "She'd tell her, 'you don't want to be a Bo Kid, do you?' [and] that would be enough to get her to do her work."

Some parents and recent graduates, however, disagree.

Roy Mitchell, the father of both a high schooler and a middle schooler, said his children have been exposed to some situations he considered discriminatory. Despite that, he feels they have been given opportunities and are receiving a good education.

"There have been a few times when someone else was allowed to march in my daughter's place in band," Mitchell said. "Other times, I feel my children have been given short answers when they've asked a question — and I've always encouraged them to ask questions. But both, fortunately, have gone into the honors program based on their grade averages."

Harvey Moore Jr., a 1995 graduate of Valdosta High who now studies at Valdosta State University, said as a student he did not feel that he had been discriminated against.

"We weren't segregated," Moore said. "We were put in classes because of how we did with our grades."

Moore, who said he was in "all level-III (honors-level) classes" graduated with a B average. He said he wasn't active in many extracurricular activities because, after football and studying, free time was slim.

"There may have been more white students in my classes, but things seemed to be balanced," Moore said. "We had the same number of both in all classes, it seemed."

Moore also said he felt he got the same amount of encouragement from teachers as his white counterparts.

"It didn't matter to the teachers whether we were white or black," Moore said.

attempting at this time to treat all students at VMS with the respect and care that they deserve and need, including those that may not be considered "advantaged".

It is never an easy task to satisfy the demands and needs of a student body and their parents. I feel that Mr. McDonald is trying to balance the scales as he considers the needs of the students for which he is responsible.

At the two meetings recently held to consider the changes at VMS, there have been many parents in attendance to advocate on behalf of their children. These children are indeed blessed to have such caring parents.

Many of these parents were parents — such as myself — of the children in the gifted program and on the top teams of their grade. There were fewer parents of children of the lowest team of each grade. I would like to address the needs of these children; to advocate for them.

Research indicates that tracking (ability grouping) can be detrimental for the lower tracked

children. I believe that it often sets children up for failure in life. At VMS, the lower 6th- and 7th-grade teams are on separate wings from the top teams, segregated from the higher-achieving students. Even in the morning, while waiting in line for the first bell, the lower 6th-grade team is lined separately from the other two teams. I am concerned about the impact that this separation has on these children.

I believe that Mr. McDonald is working hard to allow these children to build self-esteem and regain hope for their future, while at the same time, trying to ensure that our higher-achieving students do not lose educational opportunities that they need. I do not see how he, with any conscience, can allow the separation of the lower students to continue. He seems to be working to develop a win-win situation for all of our students.

Success is not just a perfect SAT score; success is when every student has the opportunity to learn to his full potential, and then some. My own child's suc-

cess cannot compensate for nor justify the "disadvantaging" of other children. There are more effective ways other than ability grouping alone to educate all our children. We help our own children as we help to ensure the success of all children. As stated by a father at Monday evening's meeting, we do indeed have to play the hand that we are dealt, but I think that we can help others and ourselves in learning how to play a better game.

I have faith in education having the power to impact lives of students and future generations. I am grateful for the educators who have believed in me and encouraged me to achieve. I feel that changes are being made in this system in an attempt to provide a greater chance of success in the futures of more of our students. We must show every child that we have high expectations of them and that we support them and believe in them. All children!

It won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

VDT
7-7-97

Sheryl Giddens
Valdosta

Gifted program reaches out to n

By PAMALA J. WILLIAMS

Times Staff Writer

They're a selective bunch.

Only 6 percent of the students in the city school system will make it through the testing required to determine whether they qualify for the gifted program. Only a small percentage of those gifted and talented students represents the system's majority population — the minority student.

This year, according to Dr. Brenda Smith, the assistant superintendent who works with the city's gifted program, the state adjusted acceptance criteria to reach a broader base of students and draw more minorities into gifted education.

In years past, students were included in the gifted program after scoring high enough on mental ability and academic achievement tests. This year, for the first time, students also were evaluated for motivation and creativity, Smith explained. Students must now meet minimum score requirements in three of the four

component areas: they must earn a 96 percent or above on a mental ability test (an IQ test, the Otis-Linnen test), they must score in the 90th percentile or higher on an achievement test (the ITBS or other standardized tests) and must perform well on a creativity test (the Torrance Test of Creativity). While the state is still trying to find an accurate tool to measure motivation in elementary aged children, for middle and high schoolers a student's grade point average is used as the barometer.

Students who score in the 90th percentile on either their total reading or total math portions of the ITBS automatically are referred for gifted testing, Smith explained. Parents or teachers can refer a student for testing and, in some cases, the student may even choose to refer themselves for the testing.

While the standards were broadened to help draw in more students — from the academically to the artistically gifted, Smith says after the first year she already can tell the numbers of

minorities won't increase by much.

"It has not borne the results that we thought it would have," Smith said. "This won't make a marked difference."

How do you change the system so that more gifted and talented minority students can be identified?

"There are no quick answers," Smith said. "We still give the same types of tests and I'm sure these tests, when 'normed,' did not have representative minority samples."

While the system does test hundreds of students each year, few will be identified as gifted, Smith said.

"At Lomax-Pinevale alone, we'll test 60 students this fall," Smith said. "That's about the same number we tested at that school last year and two or three ended up being identified as gifted or talented."

In 1996, there were 456 students in the system identified as gifted and talented. Of those, 79 percent (363) were white, 16 percent (73)

7, 1997

minorities

were black, less than one percent (3) were Hispanic, 3 percent (15) were Asian and less than one percent (2) were multi-racial.

Race is not the issue in school controversy

DEAR EDITOR:

The on going controversy surrounding the Valdosta City Schools finally took the anticipated departure from reasoned, if heated, debate to illogical social fingerpointing during a recent meeting with parents at Valdosta Middle School. The

opponents of traditional teaching methods, supported by the NAACP, at last publicly aired their contention that the reason some students in the city schools are not as academically accomplished is race related, and anyone who opposes the school system's radical deviations from common sense is a racist. How can teaching children based on their willingness and capacity to learn be race related? How can giving additional instruction and concentrated attention on those who lack aptitude and focus in their studies be race related? How can assimilating students with similar academic skills be race related? Ability is color-blind. Ability is based on the individual and is a measure of desire and fortitude. Students, whether black or white, with a proficiency in academics are those who have chosen to excel. Ultimately, each student has the same opportunity to excel as every other student.

Comprising classrooms of students with similar academic backgrounds, irrespective of race, is the most efficient method to allocate resources and manpower. Students are identified who need extra instruction,

those who can proceed at a standard pace and those who desire a more advanced curriculum. Arbitrarily mixing students based on a heterogeneous sampling of the student body, in fact, not only detracts from the teacher's ability to present material based on the needs of the class, but is a disservice to the students who may receive more or less material than they need.

It actually appears that those tilting at the race windmill are attempting to mislabel and exacerbate this controversy to avoid confronting the real problems which are not in the schools but within the communities, neighborhoods and families of these scholastically challenged students. If the proponents of change really want to "help the children", then they need to address the core problems and not waste their time fingerpointing at those who also want the best for their children by having them taught in a manner and at a level commensurate with each student's ability, willingness and capacity to learn, regardless of race.

Chris Keener
Valdosta

Hardee

From page 1-A

increase from 500 to 2,800. Over the past eight years, minority students have graduated at a higher percentage than white students.

To boost minority enrollment, Hardee's office started a minority advising program. He has spoken to more than 200 churches in the last 10 years and spent hours with parents concerned about their child's well-being.

His work has not gone unnoticed. Last week, Hardee was offered the position of interim vice president for Academic Affairs at Albany State University. His last day at VSU will be July 31, and he will begin at ASU Aug. 1.

Hardee will fill in for Ernest Benson, who recently was granted a one-year sabbatical. At the end of the sabbatical, Benson will decide whether he will return to the university or retire.

Hardee also will lead the development of a comprehensive Title III program for Albany State and assume responsibility for the school's affirmative action program.

As someone who attended two traditionally black universities, Fisk University and Clark College in Atlanta, Hardee said he welcomes the chance to work at ASU. The university is also a traditionally black school with 3,600 students.

Hardee said some people "unfairly malign" such universities when questioning the need for them. He said the schools should be enhanced since they provided education for blacks when others, such as VSU, would not.

Across the nation, universities attended mostly by minorities graduate 60 percent of African Americans, but work with only 40 percent of African American students who attend college, Hardee said.

"I've learned a lot here," he said. "But I learned a lot at Fisk University. I learned a lot at Clark College in Atlanta. I see this as an opportunity to bridge the information gaps between traditionally white institutions and traditionally black institutions."

Hardee attributes VSU's success in attracting minorities to the university's environment, which "makes minority students feel like they can be successful." His office also sponsors a minority advising program and diversity week.

He admits to being "apprehensive" about leaving an environment where everyone is aware of his goals to start over at a new school. But the move also has created "tingles of excitement," he said.

Valdosta Daily Times July 11, 1997

Parents mad over math test with drug, murder questions

VDI 7-12-97

The Associated Press

RIVERSIDE, Calif. — Angry parents complained to school board members about a teacher who gave a math test asking students to compute the street value of cocaine and a hitman's salary.

The June 26 test has added up to trouble for math teacher Charles Sanders, who passed it out to his summer class at Norte Vista High School.

The test for the summer math class apparently was meant as a joke, but several students took it, said ninth grader Robert Salazar.

"I believe the gentleman should apologize," Robert's father, Joe Salazar, told Alvord Unified School District members Thursday night.

Others demanded tougher action.

"We want him fired!" said Louise Palomarez of the Mexican Political Association. "We don't want no damn apology."

Sanders has been placed on paid administrative leave pending an investigation by the school district.

Sanders didn't attend the meeting, and could not be reached by phone.

But Leigh Hawkinson, president of the teacher's union, the Alvord Educators Association, said in an interview that Sanders is "acknowledging that he made a mistake."

"He is very apologetic. He apologized to the whole class at the time that it happened and he is more than willing to apologize to anybody who is offended by what has happened," she said. "He just wants to wait and see what the best way is to do this."

School district officials said they have begun an investigation. Among the questions is whether Sanders even meant to hand out the test. He told the union the tests were in a pile of other papers and were mistakenly

given to students, Hawkinson said.

A black line at the top of the test asked for the student's name and gang affiliation.

One of the question reads: "---- has 2 ounces of cocaine and sells an 8-ball to ---- for \$320 and 2 grams to Billy for \$85 per gram, what is the street value of the balance of the cocaine if he doesn't cut it?"

Another question: "---- is in prison sentenced to six years for murder. He got \$10,000 for the hit. If his common-law wife is spending \$100 per month, how much money will be left when he gets out of prison and how many years will he get after he kills her for spending the money?"

Salazar said he doesn't agree with Sanders' tactics, but understood what he was trying to do.

"I believe he directed this to the minority kids," he said. "This is what you kids know, so this is how you're going to learn."

Readers' forum

VDT 7-13-97

There is hope for city school system

DEAR EDITOR:

We would like to thank all the people of Valdosta and Lowndes County for the six wonderful years our family spent in your community. We developed friendships through Messiah Lutheran Church, Valdosta Middle and High Schools, Roadway Express and other areas where we got involved in the community. However, we left Valdosta with heavy hearts over two situations.

First, the federal investigation into our complaint regarding the activities of five individuals at Roadway Express that forced us to leave Valdosta had not been concluded. We had hoped that it would have been completed before we moved away.

Secondly, the deterioration in the attitude of parents, students and teachers in regard to Valdosta Public Schools. Our daughter, Whitney, was Valedictorian of the VHS class of 1997 and will be attending Harvard in the fall. Our son, Taylor, is something of a math whiz. We are deeply indebted to all the teachers, principals and staff who assisted us in one of our top priorities as parents — the education of our children.

We had been concerned when we moved here in 1991 that our children would fall behind academically in such a small school system. We were pleasantly surprised at the caliber and dedication of the education professionals we encountered. Our children have received a first class — even world class — education.

As parents and as taxpayers, we could not have asked for more. We have watched with dismay

"Sorry, folks, but with
the state's rapid
population growth
we've run out of gnats
to assign to you."



Powell

these last eighteen months, to see the educational system seem to lose its way. We feel Dr. Walker must take steps immediately to turn this situation around. He must develop better lines of communication, starting with teachers who must fully support and then implement educational policy. If teachers are committed to the changes, they will be invaluable in communicating the goals

and objectives to parents and students. Likewise, if teachers are not supportive of policy changes (or even oppose them), only failure can result.

If the trends we saw developing this past year continue, we fear for this community we came to love. Our one source of hope regarding the school situation, is the school board, especially Chairman David Waller. We

know him personally as a neighbor and a friend. He cares deeply about the students, parents, teachers and the community at large. We know that he will do everything in his power to get the system back on track.

Thank you, Valdosta. We miss you.

Ernest and Gwendolyn
Robinson
Hermitage, TN

The betrayal of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall

In 1849, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts declared that it was entirely within the law for 5-year-old Sarah Roberts to have to walk past five white elementary schools to attend Boston's public school for Negroes.

Sarah's father, as reported by Richard Kluger in *Simple Justice* (Random House, 1977), kept pointing out that the school for Negroes was in woeful disrepair with shattered equipment.

Sarah's lawyer was an unyielding abolitionist, Charles Sumner, who later became a United States senator. He argued before the court that to segregate Negro schoolchildren was to "brand a whole race with the stigma of inferiority and degradation."

(Thurgood Marshall was later to say in a 1988 dissent — *Kadrmas vs. Dickinson Public Schools* — that "denying equal opportunity to exactly those who need it most not only militates against the ability of each poor child to advance herself, but also increases the likelihood of the creation of a discrete and permanent underclass.")

Sarah Roberts was ordered to keep going past the

OPINION



NAT
HENTOFF

five white schools because, said the court, segregated schools are not only legal, but they benefit both races.

Roberts vs. The City of Boston became the primary basis for the United States Supreme Court's decision in the 1896, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which made constitutional the racist doctrine of separate but equal. It took the NAACP — led by Thurgood Marshall — many years in a long, hard march through the courts to achieve a 1954 Supreme Court decision — in *Brown vs. Board of Education* — that segregated public schools are inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional.

In 1997, the NAACP is in the process of deciding whether its priority ought to be strengthening black schools rather than continuing to expend energy and resources in desegregating public schools. In a front-page *New York Times* story (June 23), reporter Steven Holmes noted that there is rising opposition within the NAACP to holding onto its defining historic principle of integration. Its chairwoman, Myrlie Evers-Williams, confirms that "a debate has been raging as to whether that is still the position we should take."

And outside the NAACP, Amos Quick — a black member of a Greensboro, N.C., citizens committee redrawing school boundaries — says that "our biggest concern now is whether our schools will be

equal. Separate but equal would not be too bad." In response to the *New York Times* story, NAACP president Kweisi Mfume issued a "clarifying" statement in doublespeak — much like a White House lawyer's spin.

Said Mfume: "Issues of population shifts, attitudes on race, and changing demographics periodically require a careful review of policies and positions in an effort to measure their effect versus their intent."

He added, in passing, that there are tools that "can effectively be used to achieve integration in education. ... They will also be the subject of periodic review."

More forthright is Sandra McGary, chairwoman of the NAACP board's education committee:

"When you listen to the views of the community and listen to the parents, they are telling us that things are not right."

Things indeed are not right. There is absolutely no momentum in Congress, including among liberals, to do anything about the increasing resegregation of the public schools, some of which look like Boston's school for Negroes in Sarah Roberts' time. But will the NAACP's version of all-black schools make a difference, and if so, in which direction?

Black parents oppose such attempts at desegregation as forced busing. So do white parents. Both

want neighborhood schools. However, after busing ended in Norfolk, Va. — according to a recent New Press book, "Dismantling Desegregation" — the school system became much more segregated under the busing plan. And in a majority of the black segregated schools there, more than 90 percent of the students are poor. "Concentrated poverty," the report adds, "is related strongly to low academic achievements and high dropout rates."

In *Milliken vs. Bradley*, a 1974 case on integrating the Detroit schools, Thurgood Marshall, in dissent, accused the Court of emasculating "the right of all of our children, whatever their race, to an equal start in life and to an equal opportunity to reach their full potential as citizens. ... Unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together."

As the NAACP slides back into segregated history, where are the dissenting voices of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (a separate organization), the Urban League, the ACLU and the civil rights paladins? Are they trying to protect the NAACP by their silence? This is hardly the time for civility — an approach to crucial divisions that Thurgood Marshall hardly prized.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the rest of the Bill of Rights.

Teachers respond to federal review

VDT 7-14-97
By PAMALA J. WILLIAMS
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — Student success in school is not determined by their complexion, teachers say. That success is determined by factors ranging from behavior to motivation to parental involvement.

As the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) completes a compliance review at Valdosta Middle School, many teachers feel it will be important not only to look at the statistics, but at all the factors involved in determining classroom or study group composition.

Several teachers agreed to talk about the issues they are facing, but asked not be identified for this article.

"With the students who succeed, it's not about black-versus-white," a teacher from within the city system said. "It was always about academics."

The teachers said students often are grouped by default, because of behavior or personal choice.

"I've had parents of black students come to me and say they want their child moved into an upper division class, regardless of whether or not they thought that child could handle the workload, because they didn't want their student sitting in a classroom beside another student who is a behavior problem," one teacher

said. "I've had white parents come in with similar requests."

The participation of a parent in a child's education also has a direct bearing on the success level of that student, the teacher and administrators said.

Sometimes, students remain in a low-level class, or are forced to sit next to that disruptive student, because parents don't take an active stance to change the situation.

"Parents are a big part of the problem," said Mary Willis, a parent with a background in teaching. "Things happen to people who think it is better to say nothing. I hope this [the pending compliance review and a board-driven, ongoing system-wide investigation] will be a wake-up call to parents. I don't want parents to think what they have to say won't make a difference. We have to instill in our parents that their own academic credentials don't limit their credentials as a concerned parent."

Teachers have also noticed "natural" segregation. When students are allowed to work in groups, they often choose to work in groups that are familiar.

"Very rarely do those groups cross over," the teacher said. "It is so natural for them to gravitate toward people with similar experiences — friends from their own neighborhood, playmates. It's not really a color choice, they choose to work with their friends."

School board got no mandate to restructure

DEAR EDITOR:

I am angered and appalled by the situation currently facing Valdosta High School principal Mr. William Aldrich and the Valdosta Board of Education. Having worked with Mr. Aldrich in the school system and watched our daughter graduate with distinction from VHS, I can honestly say that during his years as principal, Valdosta's children have been very well served by his care and guidance.

Anyone needing reassurance of that needs only to read the program listing the awards and scholarships won by this year's high school graduates. It was truly awe-inspiring and did not happen "just by accident," but reflects a lot of hard work by a lot of good people. It is to be hoped they will be asked their opinions and listened to.

When voting for the present members of the board of education, I do not remember giving any mandate to them allowing the wholesale restructuring of the entire school system. To see so many parents withdrawing their children from the elementary school level on up through the high school is heartbreaking; they are taxpayers, after all, and are entitled to be served much better than this disgraceful mess.

I and others would be very interested in seeing publication of the job description under which Dr. Gary Walker was hired. It might also be to our advantage for Dr. Walker to reread it!

DT 7-14-97 Jacqueline Clark
Valdosta

Parents important to students' success

VDT 7/14/97
By PAMALA J. WILLIAMS
Times Staff Writer

Factors that help determine a student's success level in school often have little to do with the child and nearly everything to do with the parent.

According to national research prepared by Child Trends Inc., some of the determining factors of a child's success are the education level of the parent, active participation by the parents in the child's education and the marital status of the parent.

"Many educators believe that children are more likely to do well in school if their parents are involved in school activity than if the parents are uninvolved," wrote Nicholas Zill and Christine Windquist Nord in *Running in Place: How American Families are Faring in a Changing Economy and an Individualistic Society*. That study was prepared for Child Trends, a nonpartisan research organization that keeps track of children, youth and fam-

ily issues.

"The fact that the parent both-ers to get involved communicates to the child that he or she consid-ers school important," the study found. "In addition, parental partici-pation in organized school activities is usually an indication that the parent provides other forms of encouragement and sup-port for the learning process out-side of school."

Children who live with both of their natural parents, have a mother who works outside the home part-time, and who have parents who volunteer at school and attend meetings and pro-grams seem to be the best acade-mic performers, the Child Trends study indicates.

A child from a single-parent home, however, is less likely to have involved parents and less likely to be successful in school. If that single parent doesn't work and has less than a high school education, indications from the national research show that

See PARENTS, page 2-A

Parents

From page 1-A

parental involvement with the child's education and the level of student success decreases.

"The principle that emerged from this research is 'the more, the more.' That is, people who are active in one area — say volun-teering for charities — are more, not less, likely to be active in other areas, such as voting and attendance at orchestral concerts or art museums," Zill and Nord wrote. "Conversely, individuals who stay at home a great deal and watch a lot of television tend to show low rates of participation in a wide range of social, cultural, civic and recreational activities...In general, one might think that students from families who fit the low involvement profile would be more likely to need sup-port and assistance at school than those from families who fit the high involvement profile."

Population statistics in Valdosta suggest a large percent-age of this city's children come from the group least likely to have involved parents.

In the city of Valdosta, statis-tics from the 1990 Census and the Georgia Municipal Guide indi-cate 21 percent (2,055) of families within the city limits are female-headed, single-parent homes, with more than half (1,300) of those families qualifying for pub-lic assistance.

Female-headed, single parent homes account for 49.5 percent of all families in Valdosta living below the poverty level, and one-third of all children under the age of 18 (3,644) are living in poverty.

Betty Howell, a single parent whose two children are beating the odds, agrees that involvement and encouragement make a big difference with how well a child will perform.

Howell's daughter graduated from Lowndes High School this year with a 3.88 grade point aver-age, and will pursue a nursing degree at Georgia Southern University. Her son, a 10th-grader,

is also performing well in school.

Howell believes the difference is the amount of time she spent encouraging her children to do well.

While raising her children, she worked as a teacher's aide. Although her financial resources were extremely limited, the atten-tion and care shown her children was never short, she said.

"But some parents are forced to work for minimum wage dur-ing a 3-to-11 shift, and that's hard," Howell said. "It might help if companies gave parents some time to allow them to participate, but the parent has to want to do this. Parents have to be parents, and they need to be concerned about what goes on in their child's life."

To help parents who are forced to work after school hours, the 3-to-11 shift or working a job until 6 p.m., State Sen. Mark Taylor, D-Albany, said the legislature has placed an emphasis on funding after school programs and encouraging businesses to give flex time that can be used for school activities.

Many provisions in the new welfare legislation also are tied to a student's performance in school and will require attendance at parent-teacher meetings and mandate participation in a par-enting skills course, Taylor said.

"But the government can't solve the problem of a disinter-ested parent," Taylor said. "In areas where we can see positive results, results that lead to better school performance, you will see the government investing. But ultimately, people have to be responsible for their children. People have to be parents."

Howell, reflecting on her own experiences in the classroom, echoed those sentiments.

"When you see a child in the classroom not getting their work done, the parents usually don't care," Howell said. "The parents don't become a part of their chil-dren's lives."

TUESDAY

July 15, 1997

SPORTS: Atlanta Braves slam their way past Phillies — Page 10-A

WEATHER: Partly cloudy skies over South Georgia with highs in the lower 90s

The Valdosta Daily Times

Vol. 92 — No. 273

Valdosta, Georgia

50 cents

Speakers question BOE policies

By **PAMALA J. WILLIAMS**
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — The public voiced concerns once again to the Valdosta Board of Education during its Monday night board meeting. The speakers included a retired system teacher, a seventh grader, parents and a preacher.

The topics were as varied as the speakers.

Amelia Halter, who will be a Valdosta Middle School seventh grader, stood up to defend the school's current gifted edu-

cation program. David Sumner asked again about the possibility of holding an open forum, while Laronnia Williams and others spoke out against leveling in the classroom.

Amelia stood at the podium and told board members that she was mostly a straight A student, but some of the changes she has seen at her school over the past year, she's "not so sure about."

"Education is supposed to be like a brick house, you build another layer each year," Amelia said. "But this year, I feel like that house has been slowly deterior-

ating, we are tearing down that house and putting in round stones that don't fit too well. I'm too confused to tell what is going on right now."

Amelia also said she didn't think the proposed gifted facilitator model will be fair to students in the enrichment program.

"It's hard to know what's going on if you have to miss class to go to your gifted room and then have to make up the work," she said.

Before Sumner began speaking, he set his stopwatch on the podium to be sure

he spoke within the board's five-minute rule.

His questions and a sharp response from Board Chairman David Waller were well within that time limit.

"This is the third time I've requested a public, open meeting similar to the forum held by our state school superintendent and I would like to know where we stand on this," Sumner said. "Have you voted on this? Have you reached a decision? This is the third time I've come before you to ask this and I would really like an answer."

Waller responded that he has no intention of holding such a meeting until a board-initiated investigation of the school system has been completed. Waller also scolded Sumner by telling him, "At all the meetings you have appeared at, you have gotten out of control."

During Sumner's last board appearance, he was cut off by board members at the end of his five minutes. At that meeting he also asked about the possibility of having a forum so parents could ask the

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From Page 1-A

board questions about issues including curriculum and new or proposed educational programs.

Board Attorney Gary Moser said late Monday evening he was completing the 49th and final deposition-style interview. He planned to have all of the depositions transcribed by the end of the week and said he anticipated being ready to make a presentation to the board on July 21. Moser also said the plan has always been for full disclosure to the board and the public, via local media.

Waller announced at the end of the school board meeting that the meeting may not be held until the end of next week. After the meeting, he explained there may be a few days delay to give board members enough time to read the document, expected to be between 2,000 and 3,000 pages.

"We hope this will allow us to begin to make some decisions," Waller said. He also said he was unsure about when the investigation report would be made available to the public. He added he expects Moser's presentation to be made during an executive ses-

sion.

Others who spoke at the meeting voiced concerns about leveling, calling for heterogeneous grouping in all classes.

"As I look at a system of leveling, not only in Valdosta but across the country, I see African American children who have become a victim to a system that is unfair to them," said Valetta B. Delaney, a parent and a social worker who handles cases of child abuse and neglect. "If we put these children into heterogeneous classes, our children will grow."

Similar views were echoed by the Rev. Mark Pierson of St. Paul AME Church and Alma Williams, a former city board member and former city teacher.

"For years we have said little or nothing as our children have been separated on the playground or in the classroom, shifted to lower level and chapter classes," said Laronnia Williams, a teacher with the Valdosta city system before and after integration. "There is no way to squeeze 40 years of silence into five minutes,"

Segregation in integrated public schools?

DEAR EDITOR:

The citizens of Valdosta have recently become aware of problems that exist within the city school system. On "60 Minutes" June 29, Diane Sawyer did a segment on "Tracking" or ability grouping as it is called. Some parents and teachers, especially black parents and teachers have known of the existence of this form of racial segregation within our school system, and now Dr. Gary Walker is trying to rectify this practice. Here are some facts that support what Mrs. Alma J. Williams commented on recently in this paper.

In tracked schools, students are categorized according to measures of intelligence, achievement, or aptitude, and are then assigned to hierarchical ability- or interest-grouped classes. Although most elementary schools have within-class ability grouping, tracking is most common at the middle and high school levels.

Recently, a wide range of national educational and child advocacy organizations have recommended the abolition of tracking. Their reason is that too often tracking creates class and race-linked differences in access to learning. In fact, because of the inequities in opportunity it creates, tracking is a major con-

tributor to the continuing gaps in achievement between disadvantaged and affluent students and between minorities and whites. (Oakes, 1992; 1985).

Although tracking has declined nationwide in recent years, it remains widespread. For example, in grade seven about two-thirds of all schools have ability grouping in some or all subjects, and about a fifth group homogeneously in every subject. Moreover, the prevalence of ability grouping increases when there are sizable enrollments of black students (Braddock, 1990).

Not surprisingly, the changeover to heterogeneous groupings — generally called either detracking or untracking — remains controversial. The greatest concern among both parents and educators is that heterogeneous grouping may slow down the learning of high-achieving students, for there is evidence that high achievers do better in accelerated classes for gifted and talented (Kulick, 1991). Oakes (1992), however, has pointed out that the benefits these students experience are not from the homogeneity of the group, but from their enriched curriculum — which lower track students would also thrive on, given sufficient.

It is also clear that tracking can work against high achievers, particularly where a large number of the students are above aver-

age. Districts vary enormously in their cut-offs for slow and gifted learners. In fact, suburban, middle-class districts, where students perform above the national average, generally have cut-offs for their gifted and talented programs, and are therefore most likely to send many capable students to regular or unaccelerated classes (Useem, 1990).

The country is quickly shifting toward a belief in heterogeneous groupings, and many schools have already begun detracking. Perhaps the key to a detracked culture is the commitment to be inclusive. Teachers, parents, and students alike believe in the right and ability of students from every background to learn from the best kind of curriculum. They are also convinced that all students can gain academically and socially from learning together and from each other.

Middle-class parents must be assured that their children will not be subjected to a watered-down curriculum. They must also be helped to rethink the competitive, individualistic way in which they have come to view schooling, and to see how learning improves when students listen to others from different backgrounds, share knowledge, and teach their peers.

According to Carol Ascher, it is critical that teachers be actively involved in the change, and also

receive professional development prior to, during, and after the detracking process. Instead of teachers fighting reteaching methods, they should support efforts to improve all student learning. Ultimately, detracking should be reflected in all areas of school life.

Is there a need for alternative assessment?

Standardized testing has been the handmaiden of tracking, assuring teachers, students, and administrators alike that there is a rationale behind the hierarchical sorting of students. Although standardized tests will likely continue to be used for some purposes, they tend to work against a detracked culture. First, they see ability as static, not dynamic, and they suggest what students already know, not where they need help. Second, they create an emphasis on teacher talk, seat work, and rote learning — all of which are antithetical to the interactive, problem-solving and egalitarian working of a detracked school.

Although tracking remains controversial among both educators and parents, there has been a recent policy consensus that the negative effects of tracking on lower track students are so severe that schools should move towards detracking.

Kirk Johnson Jr.
Valdosta

TUESDAY

July 22, 1997

SPORTS: Dixie Boys and Pre

WEATHER: Partly cloudy skie

The Valdosta

Vol. 92 — No. 280

Valdosta

Transcripts from investigation read in BOE closed-door session

By PAMALA J. WILLIAMS
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — The Valdosta Board of Education met in executive session Monday night to read transcriptions of 49 interviews done as part of a board-initiated probe. The system-wide investigation was initiated to track down the cause of problems affecting the city system over the past year.

Before the board moved into executive its legality was questioned by a reporter from *The Valdosta Daily Times*. The Times challenged the move based on advice from the Georgia Press Association. The GPA maintains that information resulting from a fact-gathering initiative must be presented in a public forum. Gary Moser, the school board's attorney advised the board that the executive session was legal as it fell under the provisions of "attorney-client privilege."

The board reportedly spent the executive session reading transcripts of 40 of the 49 interviews. Following the meeting board members said they had been given the opportunity to begin reading the documents Friday.

Originally, Moser, had planned to present the board with the full transcript of all interviews, conducted over a three-week period. At the beginning of Monday night's meeting, however, Moser apologized

to the board that he had just found out nine of the transcribed interviews were missing. The interviews were still in the court reporter's hands, he said, being transcribed.

"There are aspects and important points in those nine interviews," Moser said while advocating the board postpone the meeting until it could get the full document. "You won't get a complete complete picture without them."

Board member Warren Lee and others seated on the dais immediately made it known they didn't intend to wait another night to begin their work. Waller said the board would "definitely get started tonight."

During the meeting, Moser's assistant came in to tell him five of the missing nine transcripts were finished. The rest would be done Tuesday. The board will meet again at 7:30 p.m., today, at West Gordon Elementary. Members plan to go back into executive session to read the remaining nine transcripts and "may make some decisions," Board Chairman David Waller said. Those decisions will be voted upon during an open session.

According to Jim Ellington, an attorney for the Georgia Press Association, the reporting of information from an inquiry like the school board's

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"must be done in public session."

Since the board was not planning to discuss hiring, firing or disciplinary actions against an employee of the system, Ellington said the board could not claim to meet under the personnel provisions for executive session.

Likewise, the probe was done as an act of information gathering. That information should now become a public document and is not subject to protection under the attorney/client privilege, Ellington said. According to "A Pocket Guide to Georgia

Sunshine Laws" a meeting can be legally closed to "discuss employment, periodic evaluations or disciplinary actions regarding a public officer or employee. However, the presentation of evidence or argument in disciplinary cases must be open. And any action taken must occur at an open meeting."

Moser countered by citing Ga. Code 5-29 (federal supplement 10-56). A portion of that statute maintains that just because a government body is a public entity, they do not lose the right to be protected by the attorney-client privilege.

Hardee looking ahead

By JODI M. SCOTT

Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — Colleges and universities around the state and nation often turn to Valdosta State University to learn how to retain minority students.

For Jerry Hardee, the explanation is simple.

"I'm not sure anything I'm telling them is drastically different than what

HARDEE:

should be done for any student — treat them fairly, provide opportunities for growth, nurture them and provide good role models," said Hardee, who at the end of this month will leave his position as VSU's assistant to the president for Equal Opportunity Programs/Multicultural Affairs.

During his 13-year tenure at VSU, Hardee has seen the number of African-American students

See HARDEE, Page 2-A

Right to equal access belongs to everyone

DEAR EDITOR:

I just read the article about the NAACP is going to try to keep up quotas and preferential admissions to Georgia's public colleges/universities.

From a group of people who have faced discrimination in the past, how can they blatantly advocate discrimination when it suits their purpose.

Yes, I am a white male. I am a working white male who has raised three sons comfortably, but was not able financially to give them college educations. Where does the blue-collar, white person turn to get their intelli-

gent children a higher education? After all, is the phrase "a mind is a terrible thing to waste" only applicable to minority minds?

Believe it or not, most whites are hard working, struggling-to-get-by parents. Who do we turn to when our right to equal access is discriminated against?

Blacks are smart. They've organized into a non-militant, aggressive group who make politicians cringe at the idea of having this block of voters against them if they even hint of voting against the NAACP's way of thinking.

Every time some white steps forward to try to speak up for our rights, he's tied to some racist or militant group and his credibility is destroyed and dismissed.

I want to know, is there any grass roots program or organization currently working to stick up for the rights of "non-minorities" which is not tied to a racist or militant faction?

Unity is power to politicians and the disorganized millions of white people in this country don't scare them in the least when it comes to election time. It's overdue that the politicians feel our ire!

Mark Parker
Valdosta

VDT 7-11-97

Hardee leaving VSU

By JODI M. SCOTT

Times Staff Writer



HARDEE

VALDOSTA — An administrator honored last month for his dedication to Valdosta State University has been named interim vice president for Academic Affairs at Albany State University.

Dr. Jerry L. Hardee, who currently serves as VSU's assistant to the president for Equal Opportunity Programs/Multicultural Affairs, will begin at ASU on Aug. 1. The appointment was announced Tuesday by Dr. Portia Holmes Shields, president of ASU.

Hardee will fill in for Ernest Benson, who recently was granted a one-year sabbatical. At the end of the sabbatical, Benson will decide whether he will return to the university or retire.

Hardee will also lead the development of a comprehensive Title III program for Albany State and assume responsibility for the University's Affirmative Action program. Hardee could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Dr. Hugh Bailey, president of VSU, said Hardee's position will be advertised throughout the United States, primarily in the *Journal of Higher Education*.

Bailey said he considered Hardee's promotion an indication of the "caliber of people" employed by VSU.

"We're always glad to see our people get promoted," Bailey said.

Hardee's 37-year career has included 12 years as an administrator and faculty member at VSU.

Last month, Hardee was honored by co-workers and friends for his service to VSU. During the luncheon, the Mass Choir director, A.C. Braswell, announced that the Jerry L. Hardee award for academic achievement had been established and would be awarded to the choir member with the highest grade point average.

Hardee was also thanked for his community service, which has included the Kiwanis Club, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and Project Change.