

Voice of the People

Minority students continue to get shortchanged

Dear Editor: It comes as no surprise that the Madison Metropolitan School District Minority Student Achievement Program is under sudden attack (as reflected in a series of stories in Sunday's Wisconsin State Journal).

Many parents of children of color realized some time ago that the principals at their particular schools showed no remorse as they chose to distribute those funds allocated for the sole purpose of increasing minority student achievement in any manner they saw fit.

Time and again, in meeting after meeting, letter after letter, involved minority parents have sought answers to questions regarding expenditures that may have been of benefit to all students, such as swimming lessons, copier toner, Ready-Set-Go conferences, or even textbooks, irresponsibly paid for by Minority Student Achievement monies instead of being budgeted for out of the general fund.

Perhaps this will explain one facet of why many minority students' achievement scores remain remarkably lower than average. They are being taught

to swim instead of to spell, read and write. While I might agree that swimming should be a requirement for graduation from our school system, I believe it's safe to say that for the most part, parents would prefer their children learn skills that will better enable them to attend a college, and/or obtain gainful employment upon graduation from district schools.

Too often those in authority have taken it upon themselves to choose what is best for our students, particularly students of color, and will claim that this is necessary because of the difficulties surrounding the lack of parental involvement. However, I will note that the more parents of color attempt to stay involved with Madison schools, the more alienated, frustrated and rejected they become, simply because their input is not welcomed. It is generally overlooked when the time approaches for decision-making.

What should occur is a thorough housecleaning at the district level — including the extraction of numerous principals

— which should eliminate those decision-makers who exhibit ignorance, who condone wasteful practices and who are making unconscionable decisions regarding the Minority Student Achievement Program, its objectives and the needs and concerns of students of color and their parents.

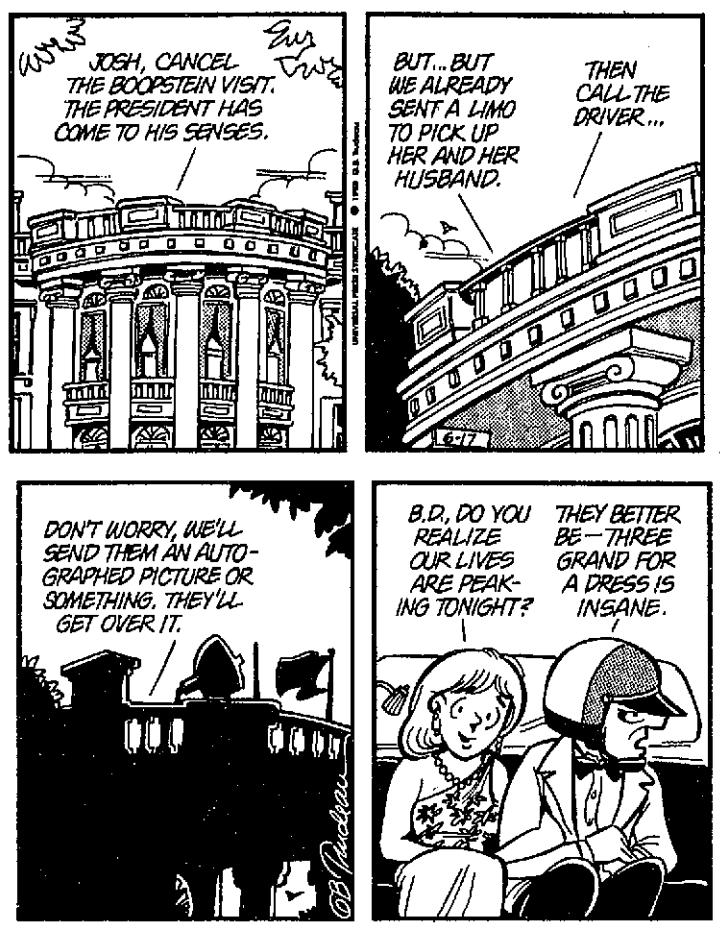
For too long, these types of situations have occurred with the Madison schools. It's been business as usual, and one has to just focus on the Affirmative Action Plan, or the suspension and expulsion procedures and data, to realize how traumatized our students and parents are by the habitual deeds of those paid to educate our children.

When will the district begin to inspire instead of insult us? How will a resurgence for minority students in our school system be brought about? Unless we begin to confront the message and messengers that tend to destroy our children's hopes for the future, we shall surely perish.

Regina Rhyne
Madison

DOONESBURY

by Garry Trudeau



Serb coverage has critical gap

Dear Editor: A look at United Nations records shows the need for a quantum leap in the credibility of the major dispatchers of international news in America.

The government of Serbia and Montenegro has been telling the world since, at least, as long ago as August 1992 that U.N. observers should be placed on the border between Serbia and Bosnia to insure that military supplies don't cross. Despite closely following the war in various media, I didn't see Belgrade's willingness for monitors mentioned anywhere in the news until May 1993.

I learned about the official position of Serbia and Montenegro by asking their U.N. mission office and confirming what they told me with the General Assembly record at the UW library.

When I telephoned Bosnia's U.N. mission, the staff member I was directed to was unaware of Belgrade's position on border observers. Apparently, since it wasn't widely reported, he didn't get any questions about it.

Belgrade's plan for sealing the Serbia/Bosnia border may have been insincere or impractical. It probably wouldn't have stopped the war and it didn't necessarily absolve Serbia (proper) from guilt.

The important thing here is that for months we talked about bombing Serbia, maybe even the capital, Belgrade, and the cornerstone of Belgrade's response to the world's accusations was purposely left out of the discussion.

Tremendous new opportunities for building a post Cold War international consensus will go unexplored unless we demand reports of what our enemies and potential enemies are proposing.

Peter Blankenheim
Sun Prairie

School costs up, but is quality?

Dear Editor: In an effort to increase spending for public education, some Madison School Board members, along with Madison School Superintendent Cheryl Wilhoite, want a new state study of how public education is financed in Wisconsin. I have a better idea.

Rather than studying ways to funnel more money to public education, how about asking the state to study the impact of huge school spending increases on the quality of the product coming out of our public schools?

Annual spending for public education in Wisconsin has more than doubled in the past 12 years, from \$2.3 billion in 1980-81 to \$5.3 billion in 1992-93. School enrollment over that same time has gone down.

In light of this trend, it would be useful to know if the approximately \$16.7 billion 12-year investment (over base 1980-81 funding) has increased any objective measures of academic performance among K-12 students. Have state dropout rates decreased? Are high school graduates better equipped to go on to college or to work? How has this money been spent? How much reached the classroom? What, specifically, have the taxpayers of Wisconsin received for this substantial investment in public education?

These are the questions that need to be answered before Wisconsin taxpayers once again fall victim to the old, tired slogans which claim education quality can be measured only by how much money schools can separate from taxpayers.

Steve Baas
Madison

Wisconsin needs death penalty

Dear Editor: The Parade section of the Wisconsin State Journal recently reported the results of a national poll which indicated 84 percent of the respondents favored capital punishment.

Not long ago, a poll indicated over 70 percent of Wisconsin voters were also in favor of it.

The Democratic Party at its recent convention came down on the side of being against it.

I don't think that is what Abraham Lincoln had in mind when he stated at Gettysburg, "... and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

If the people of Wisconsin are so much in favor of a law of this type, why has the Legislature not had the intestinal fortitude to put such a law on the books to get rid of the rotten apples in our society?

George Alderson
Madison

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