

# THE MADISON TIMES

THE PAPER THAT'S MORE THAN BLACK AND WHITE

Free — Take One

October 1-7, 1999

Vol. 8, No. 40



*WCATY's Children of Promise Funds and other programs expose academically gifted kids to a variety of accelerated challenges, says Kaleem Caire.*

## *WCATY offers opportunities for excellence*

by Anita Martin

Eight-five percent of all incarcerated individuals don't have a high-school diploma, and studies indicate that having education or technical training beyond high school increases one's chances of sustaining a living above the poverty line.

"We could improve on social problems if everyone in the community becomes involved in getting kids to be successful in school," says education specialist Kaleem Caire, who was hired in August as special projects director for the Wisconsin Center for Academically Talented Youth (WCATY). Caire became interested in WCATY when young people told him what a big dif-

See EXCELLENCE /page 19

2 of 2

## EXCELLENCE / from page 1

ference the agency had made in their lives. A nonprofit organization that has served 16,000 students, parents, and educators since 1991, WCATY is a private, member-driven agency that supports, motivates, and challenges academically talented students who score in or above the 95th percentile on nationally standardized achievement tests. Founder Dr. Ellie Schatz, Ph.D., has provided leadership for the Madison-based organization since its inception. "People think all these programs are (only) for wealthy White kids, nerdy kids, but they are far from that," Caire says. "Black parents might think these programs aren't for their kids, but that's not true. They are open to anyone who fulfills the requirements."

Students become eligible for WCATY programs by participating in the Midwest Talent Search (MTS) or the Midwest Talent Search for Young Students (MTSY), both of which are administered by Northwestern University's Center for Talent Development (CTD). CTD offers financial aid for the SAT, ACT, or ACT-Explore tests. Currently, applications for MTS and MTSY are available through guidance counselors or learning coordinators, and postmark deadlines begin in late October.

WCATY's programs and services include: Educator Recognition program, Young Students Summer program (in which fourth to sixth graders attend Beloit College for a week), Accelerated Learning program (in which seventh to 10th graders attend high-school honor-class equivalents in a three-week summer residential program), Senior program (in which high-school students earn university credit), the Harlan O. Roberson Poetry competition, and the Young Scholar Project program (in

which seventh and eighth graders learn how to write grants.) To identify gifted youth younger than grade four, WCATY plans to pilot the STAR Reading and Math assessments later this year. Presently used by 11 percent of public and private schools in Wisconsin, STAR will help identify academically talented kids in public, private, and home-school situations beginning in their second semester of first grade.

This fall, WCATY embarks on its second year of Children of Promise, a program that identifies the talents of financially disadvantaged students and students of color and increases their rates of participation in MTS, MTSY, and WCATY programs. The calculations used to determine economic disadvantage differ from the schools' formula.

The goal of WCATY's Children of Promise funds, which is a partnership with the UW System Multicultural Center, is essentially to nourish talents. Caire believes that if gifted youth of color are given opportunities to excel and the necessary support and responsibility, they will flourish. "We need to give our kids the necessary information to help them be successful," Caire said, "not keep them clueless."

Since many community programs designed for minority students are remedial in nature, Caire is pleased that this future-focused program centers on strengths rather than on perceived deficits.

The Children of Promise program fosters positive peer support, provides meaningful mentoring, and creates a nurturing environment in and out of school. "Most high-school kids of color say that they don't have kids (like them) in accelerated classes. And a lot of them don't have any friends like them-

selves around that act like they want to do well in school," Caire said. Kids need to see how different kinds of people became successful, he added. "They need to realize that success doesn't come the same way for everyone, but [that] it will come given the right timing and hard work."

Herein lies an opportunity for a paradigm shift, says Caire, who is convinced that we need to **change the way kids of color, particularly African Americans and Latinos, think about themselves as students.** He says as soon as a young person comes to or is contacted by the WCATY, their expectations of themselves immediately begin to change. Rather than seeing themselves as struggling in school, they begin to **themselves as academically successful.** "We want to work with teachers so they become aware of the [WCATY] kids' goals," said Caire. These teachers will then expect more of WCATY students, and, in turn, the students' parents will probably expect more from the teachers.

According to research on how others' expectations impact individual student performance, **kids display more confidence when their teachers as well as their parents believe in their abilities.** The focus then turns to working as a team to optimize learning and achieve goals, Caire says, as perceptions become realities.

Founders say that the Children of Promise program will have an extraordinary impact on youth. They forecast that these students will make scientific and technological discoveries, manage businesses, write music, and teach the next generation. An investment in these students is an investment in the future.

WCATY members receive an informative newsletter and special access to experts at an annual cost of \$40. The agency has scheduled free information sessions 6-8:45 p.m. Oct. 26 and Nov. 16 for grades K-8, and Nov. 9 for high-school students with presentations on "The changing nature of college admissions: What parents and students should know about preparing for college" and "What can WCATY programs do for you?" Watch The Madison Times "What's Up?" pages for locations.

Workshops to help parents select classes using their child's transcripts are slated for spring. For details, call Caire at 271-1617 or see [www.wcaty.org](http://www.wcaty.org).

You may send contributions to WCATY to 2909 Landmark Place, Madison, WI 53713.

2 of 2