

Point of View

Editorial

Pen Mightier Than The Sword

There is peculiar quietness floating through Jackson Street these days. The tranquil setting is rather upsetting and raises a lot of questions as to its overall effect on the community at large.

In some corners it is said that the stage is being set for something good about to spring. The emptiness is tentative but the stage is being readied to bring real meaningful profitable growth to not only Jackson Street but the the Westside community at large.

A group of energetic entrepreneurs are said to be pooling their resources and know-how to make the Jackson Street corridor a scenic and most efficient and energy saving project never before ventured.

Our hats off to the pace setters. We look forward to these bold steps to take place. We patiently wait with great anxiety.

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The Best Insurance Is A Strong Public School System

Dr. James Comer has a strong notion of how our schools should work. And he is putting his ideas into action.

When he walked into a mostly black inner-city school in New Haven, Connecticut nearly two decades ago, Dr. Comer saw a school that plainly was not working. Children were yelling and screaming and hitting each other. They were acting up and insulting the teachers. Pandemonium ruled in the hallways and many of the classrooms. Many children were doing very poorly on achievement tests.

So, Dr. Comer, who is the Maurice Falk professor of child psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center and Associate Dean of the Yale University Medical School, led a community effort to

To Be Equal

New Education Initiative

by John E. Jacob

Today, the school reform movement is on a roll; its fashionable. But too much of it is off-base. Out of dozens of school reform reports only a handful call for minority and community-based involvement.

Many reformers think that if you tinker with a few requirements you've reformed the schools. You haven't. All you've done is ensure that minority kids will be pushed out faster.

And waiting in the wings are those who would destroy public education with a voucher system that would drain support and talent away from the public schools.

So we are now at a crossroads that will determine the shape of American education and the survival prospects for minority children.

That's why the Urban League movement will launch an Education Initiative

this month -- a movement-wide, planned, targeted effort with goals and timetables to improve black educational performance.

The aim is to make the schools work for the children of the poor as they now work for the children of the



John E. Jacob

affluent.

The Education Initiative will be national in scope, as Urban League affiliates frame programs based on models adaptable to local conditions. Some will modify current programs to develop greater accountability. Others will start from the ground up.

But all will be based on two firm pillars -- advocacy and services.

Advocacy will concentrate on making the schools responsive to the needs of black children. Through community organization and effective coalition-building, support can be marshalled to ensure quality educational experiences for minorities at risk.

Direct services will be

targeted to students and their families -- tutoring in math and science, counseling, dropout prevention -- whatever model affiliates determine is best for their communities.

Those services will be targeted and measured so that over a five-year period there will be significant results. This is an accountable effort with defined goals and objectives

that impact on the attitudes, performances and aspirations of our kids. We are trying to prevent another lost generation of black youth and we urge the public to work with local leadership on behalf of this Education Initiative. Public support is crucial to the success of efforts to build a quality educational system for all. Everyone has a major stake in enabling our young

John E. Jacob is President Of The National Urban League

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people to make it in this changing economy.

And everyone needs to become involved in making the schools responsive to the needs and aspirations of all of our young people.

The business community especially has spearheaded education reform and has made some progress. But it must concentrate its efforts on increasing minority achievement, for true reform can't leave behind those most at risk.

We Americans need to become more aware of the importance of investing in our young people. They are the future -- and unless we can give them a stake in our society they'll have no future and neither will we.

CHILD WATCH

By Marian Wright Edelman
President
Children's Defense Fund

Making Our Schools Work Better

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So, Dr. Comer, who is the Maurice Falk professor of child psychiatry at the Yale Child Study Center and Associate Dean of the Yale University Medical School, led a community effort to

improve New Haven's schools. Beginning with two elementary schools and eventually expanding city-wide, his program's first step was to set up a "school planning management team" made up of the principal, teachers, and parents.

"The result is that everybody has an opportunity to influence the management of that school" Comer says.

This group then took the second step: making the necessary changes to improve the "climate" of the school. "I say you must address the 'climate,'" Comer says, "because if you are in a chaotic school or a depressed school...then you can't just pour information into the kids... Children who feel uncared for and are acting up or acting out need responses that will give them guidance and

support, need to learn appropriate social skills, and so forth."

The story of one third grade student at New Haven's Baldwin elementary school, ten-year-old Matthew Monroe, shows how the Comer program works. Matthew had family problems, was well-known as a troublemaker, and because of frequent suspensions had not finished a full year in school since kindergarten. One day his anger exploded and he broke a school window. School officials developed a special program for Matthew under which he had shortened classroom hours, supervised individual study, and special tutoring for a slight reading disability. Two months after he had broken the window, Matthew was back in class full time. His academic

performance improved and he finished the year without another major problem.

Schools cannot be expected to compensate for all the social, economic, and personal strains on children like Matthew. But in the years since Comer's program has been instituted in these low-income schools, student achievement scores have gone up dramatically and absenteeism, truancy, and suspensions have gone down.

Because of his proven success in New Haven, school officials around the country have called on Dr. Comer to advise them on how to make their schools work better. "Almost anything you do where you show concern or make an effort will improve the performance

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