

First Black female astronaut wants youth to aim high

By Lou Ransom

Special to Sentinel-Voice

PITTSBURGH (NNPA) - Mae Jemison has overcome several obstacles during her stellar career that saw her become the first Black woman in space, but she doesn't want those same obstacles to ground other young minority girls.

That is why she has lent her voice to a new study that shows that parents of those students under-represented in science and engineering courses and jobs feel that their children — both boys and girls — have what it takes to succeed in these subjects in school and, afterward, in the workplace.

"First and foremost, we must applaud parents for recognizing their sons' and daughters' capacity to succeed in science, math and engineering fields, and for encouraging and assisting them regularly in their formal and informal science education," said Dr. Mae C. Jemison, the nation's first African-American female astronaut and Bayer Corporation's national spokesperson for its Making Science Make Sense program.

"That said, parents, and all adults, for that matter,

NAACP

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Youth Board Member.

According to some, Board Chairman Julian Bond wanted someone with excellent fundraising abilities and unquestioned business savvy.

The telecommunications industry veteran brought in \$25 billion in annual revenue through his unit. He managed 34,000 employees and served 33 million customers. He also helped establish a networking and mentoring group for Black men at Verizon.

In July 2002, *Fortune* magazine named Gordon to its list of the "50 Most Powerful Black Executives" and *Black Enterprise* magazine named him "1998 Executive of the Year."

In a statement, Bond says, "The search for a new chief executive office has been a long process involving potential candidates from across the country. I think we will present the Board with an outstanding candidate who will lead the NAACP on its important mission for justice and civil rights for all Americans."

This has been a turbulent year for the 96-year-old civil rights group. When the

need to be aware that our own unspoken biases are often communicated unknowingly to our children with negative impacts. When it comes to science, math and engineering, we must acknowledge that for the United States to build and maintain the kind of creative and inquisitive research that keeps discovery and innovation alive, everyone must have a seat at the table," Jemison said.

"Well, obviously, it is very important to me," Jemison recently told the *Courier*. "What is particularly important is that this is looking at it from the parents' point of view, and they are really positive about their children's future. According to the study, over 90 percent of them thought that their children could do well in science and engineering careers."

These are among the key findings in the newest national science education and science literacy survey commissioned by Bayer as part of its national program. This year's survey examines the issue of under representation of women, African-Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic Americans in sci-

ence and engineering fields from their parents' point of view. The Bayer "Facts of Science Education XI: American Parents Speak Out About Their Children and Science" polled 1,000 American parents who have at least one boy and one girl between the ages of 5 and 18 living at home.

In addition, in order to include under-represented minorities, interviews with African-American, Native American and Hispanic American parents who fit the same profile were added until each of these groups contained 250 completed surveys. A total of 1,500 surveys were conducted in March and April.

Dr. Jemison noted that the careers become more of a challenge for girls because of the perceptions of parents, and teachers, and their peers. "Science is perceived as being dull as a career," she said, "but what was the coolest subject in school? It was science, especially with all of the hands-on stuff," she said.

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Former astronaut Dr. Mae Jemison hopes to encourage minority youth to pursue jobs in engineering and science.

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girls do as well or better in science and math in high school, they tend to leave the field during college and afterward.

"These things are subtle," Jemison said. "All the way through high school, and when they go into college, with the same kinds of grades or even better grades, young women drop out of the fields faster."

Parents, according to the study, see science and technology as important engines driving the nation's economy and national security and view science and engineering careers as "desirable" and "realistic" for both their sons and daughters. At the same time, parents believe the science and engineering communities need to do a better job of making today's students more aware of the wide range of job opportunities available to them in these fields.

When it comes to the long-standing gender and minority inequities in these fields, many parents surveyed say they are aware of such inequities, and more than half say they are concerned about them. However, unlike the National Science Board, the governing board of the National Science Foundation, significant numbers of parents do not see any potential danger this inequity may pose for the United States and its ability to retain its global leadership position in science and technology.

"One of the good things about the survey is that parents thought their kids needed an advanced degree

to be involved in science and engineering. The actual fact is that 7 of 10 in the field have bachelor's degrees or less. So, opportunities are open," Jemison explained.

"We have an under representation of women and people of color. That means we're not developing over 50 percent of the talent we have available," she warned.

Overall, the survey found that parents, across the board, think both their sons and daughters are potential winners when it comes to science and math. Many report their sons (88 percent) and daughters (85 percent) are interested in science, math or engineering. Six in 10 parents (63 percent) report their sons have already expressed an interest in continuing to study or have a career in these fields, while only four in 10 (42 percent) report their daughters have expressed such an interest.

They're interested, but can they succeed? Yes, say parents. Almost all parents (96 percent sons; 95 percent daughters) are confident that their sons and daughters have the ability to succeed in these subjects in school, with nearly three-fourths (75 percent sons; 73 percent daughters) feeling "very confident."

Furthermore, nearly all of the parents (92 percent sons; 90 percent daughters) are confident that their children have the ability to succeed in science and engineering careers, with half or more saying they are "very confident" (69 percent sons; 57 percent

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