

# Black, Hispanic pupils: School is tough

WASHINGTON (AP) - Black and Hispanic students see school as a more rowdy, disrespectful and dangerous place than their White classmates do, a poll says.

The findings suggest that many minority kids are struggling in the equivalent of a hostile work environment, according to Public Agenda, a nonpartisan opinion research group that tracks education trends.

Minority children in public middle and high schools are more likely than White

children to describe profanity, truancy, fighting, weapons and drug abuse as "very serious" problems.

The Black and Hispanic children — under pressure to close their test-score gaps with Whites — also see more pervasive academic woes, such as lower standards, higher dropout rates and kids who advance even if they don't learn.

"There is so much discussion about the achievement gap, and we talk about teachers and curriculum and test-

ing and money," said Jean Johnson, Public Agenda's executive vice president and an author of the report.

"We need to add something to that list — school climate. For these kids, it has become such a distracting atmosphere," Johnson said.

Thirty percent of Black students — three in every 10 — said teachers spend more time trying to keep order in class than teaching; 14 percent of White students said the same.

More than half of Black

students said kids who lack respect for teachers and use bad language is a very serious problem, compared to less than one-third of White students.

Hispanic students also reported worse social and academic conditions in school than White children, although the gaps were not as large as they were between Blacks and Whites.

On the plus side, the poll found positive results that cut across race and ethnicity.

Majorities of children said

they are learning a lot in reading, writing and math classes. Most students said at least one teacher who has gotten them interested in a subject they usually hate.

The students agreed on matters of work ethic, too.

About eight in 10 said it is good for school districts to require higher standards, even if that means kids must go to summer school. Almost 60 percent of Black students acknowledged they could try a little harder, compared to 53 percent of Hispanics and

46 percent of whites.

In perspective, most students said schools were meeting expectations on most measures.

Yet the minority children were more likely to see students struggling to get by in class, to see unfair enforcement of discipline rules, to say schools aren't getting enough money.

"Students of color are correct in their understanding that their schools get less in the way of resources, and of- (See School, Page 14)

## Black educators divided on LA mayor's school plan

By Gene C. Johnson Jr.  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPR) - While some Black educators have expressed their determined opposition to Mayor Antonio

Villaraigosa's plan to take control of the expansive Los Angeles Unified School District, others say they are very much in favor of the mayor's ambitious effort to reform K-12 education here.

"Clearly our urban schools are in trouble. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it," said David Horne, an associate professor at Cal State Northridge and director

of the California African-American Political and Economic Institute. "We need something new."

Villaraigosa's bid follows mayor-driven shake-ups of public schools in recent years in Chicago, New York, Cleveland and Detroit.

"What you are seeing in Los Angeles might be the wave of the future, because city school districts everywhere are desperate for new answers, new governance," said Russlyn Ali of The Education Trust-West, an Oakland-based nonprofit group focused on closing the achievement gap that sepa-

rates poor and minority students from other young Californians.

"It is becoming obvious that fixing education is not something that can be done within the existing structure but [the thrust] needs to come from outside. L.A.... pushing that conversation forward," Ali said.

Villaraigosa unveiled his takeover strategy last month in his first State of the City address, during which he called for a "council of mayors" to oversee the school district, the second largest in the nation.

That proposed council — including leaders from the 26 smaller cities served by L.A. Unified and a member of the county Board of Supervisors — would hire the superintendent and approve the district's multibillion-dollar budget.

The elected Los Angeles Board of Education would not be disbanded but would be relegated to advocating for parents, ruling on student discipline and preparing annual reports on the effectiveness of schools.

O.W. Wilson, who has taught political science at Cal State Dominguez Hills for 25 years, said Villaraigosa's proposed takeover is mere "grandstanding."

"It's bringing one bureaucracy into another," Wilson said. "You're taking the school district out of the hands of educators and putting it into the hands of politicians. That is not going to work."

Stephanie Edwards-Evans, a professor of education at UCLA, said she is in favor of Villaraigosa's proposal, though it may need some fine-tuning.

"The mayor's plan has some faults and some good points, however it will be an

enormous task for him to undertake along with trying to run the city," she said. "Black students are now get-

ting the short end of the cookie, so to speak. Most of the efforts are being put into a district that is primarily

Hispanic with the lowest API scores that I have seen, ever."

When students from the (See Villaraigosa, Page 14)

## Watermelon question on college exam foments ire

Special to Sentinel-Voice

SEATTLE (NNPA) - Bellevue Community College has proposed disciplinary action against Peter Ratener, the instructor who wrote the controversial math exam question that begins "Condoleezza holds a watermelon," by suspending him for one week without pay.

According to a letter from the college to Ratener obtained by The *Seattle Medium* under the freedom of information act, it is the position that the controversy struck by the question brought disfavor to the college, damaged the college's reputation, publicly undermined its (the college's) meritorious work in pluralism, and created disruption to its academic and educational environments.

The letter also stated that the college did not believe that the question did not meet the schools standards for appropriate test material and treating students with respect.

The faculty union has filed a grievance with the school the action, as Ratener and his union representative, believe that no formal disciplinary action was necessary in the case because the Board of Trustees and the President of BCC had already formally and publicly condemned Ratener's action.

If the appeal, handled by the college president, is not acceptable to Ratener then the case can go into arbitration.

Although members of the African-American community were asking for his termination, many are happy that the college took some disciplinary action in the matter.

"We felt the appropriate remedy in this situation should be termination," said Tony Orange, executive director of the Central Area Motivation Program. "While I'm happy that the school administration has acted in a disciplinary manner that exceeds an apology, I'm sad that they did not propose our recommended remedy of termination."

This is the first complaint of racial insensitivity against Ratener in his 25 years at Bellevue Community College. Many feel that he might have been able to avoid the situation if he had attended any of the numerous opportunities provided by the college for faculty members to obtain education and training on cultural issues and the impact of stereotypical thinking on the perpetuation of racism.

"I think it's obvious that he and the people in the math department who proofread the test should have attended [the trainings]," said community activist Eddie Rye, Jr.

"If you are going to work in a multicultural society then you have to be prepared to deal with everyone in society."

The average salary of a tenured instructor at BCC is \$53,828.00 per year.



### STUDENT PROTEST

High school students raise a girl during a protest regarding changes to the public state education system in Valparaiso, 85 miles northwest of Santiago on Tuesday. In the largest student movement in the past 30 years in Chile, hundreds of thousands of students from around the country are pressuring the government to cede to their list of demands whose main points are free passes to public transportation, free entrance university entrance exams and longer school days. The poster reads, 'Copper on the ceiling and the education on the floor.'



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