

Locales fighting for schools

*By Diane Bukowski
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
DETROIT (NNPA) - From Detroit to San Francisco, Chicago to Baltimore, a tidal wave of school closings, usually in large, poor urban districts, has washed over the country.

In many cases, the closings have wreaked havoc and met with little resistance, but other communities are fighting back, in some cases calling for complete moratoriums on school closings and demanding additional "equivalent" funding for poor districts.

— Chicago: Mayor Richard Daley's "Renaissance 2010" campaign has called for closing 100 schools by 2010. A 2006 article in the *Chicago Sun Times* said closings that have taken place so far have resulted in an increase in violent incidents at the schools which are left as those from the closed schools flood in.

A 1996 study showed that students who have been moved from other schools also have lower student achievement scores than their stable counterparts.

The Chicago teachers' union and community organizations have slowed the closings through persistent

mass protests. Additionally, Black and Latino state legislators there have drafted legislation providing a way for voters to keep their schools open and have also threatened to withhold construction funding for the district. Chicago Alderman Michael Chandler has campaigned for a city ordinance that would halt school closings entirely until a study is conducted on how children displaced by closings are doing in their new schools.

Daley has responded by calling for a change in the way Illinois funds education, and he is asking for annual guaranteed increases in public education funding. Michigan Proposal 5, which would have done that, was defeated in November by a well-funded conservative campaign.

— New York City: In 2001, a New York court ruled that the state was violating its own constitution which guarantees every child the right to a "sound basic education," by failing to provide "equivalent funding" for New York City's children, 62 percent of whom live in poverty. In 2002, a higher court ordered the state to come up with \$5.6 billion in additional funding for NYC schools.

Republican Governor George Pataki appealed, a hearing was held in November, and results are still pending.

Activists with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and the Alliance for Quality Education are calling for funding the increase by increasing income taxes for the wealthiest in the state, and closing corporate tax loopholes. Additionally, New Yorkers for Smaller Class Size are petitioned for a ballot referendum requiring immediate reductions in class size. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg blocked the referendum in court, and that appeal is also pending.

— Baltimore: The Baltimore Education Advocates, a coalition of groups, is campaigning for a moratorium on school closings. It is demanding that the Maryland Governor and General Assembly comply with court orders from a 2003 fiscal equity campaign similar to New York City's by sending an additional \$1.1 billion to Baltimore schools and guarantee \$200 million annually for five years to repair and renovate school buildings, among other demands.

Baltimore City students have also established their

own Maryland Freedom Board of Education, modeled on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party of the 1960s. Their board has voted on a program for the effective use of the \$1.1 billion due to Baltimore schools.

— Seattle: Strong public opposition forced Seattle Superintendent Raj Manhas to drop plans to close schools in 2004, but he came back with a proposal to close ten schools in 2006, aided by a 14-member advisory committee of executives from the business, finance, communication and education arena. He talked the board into supporting the closures. However, two members of the board then defected, to support a community group which announced that it was suing the school district for discriminating against minority and poor students.

— San Francisco: A school board decision to close or merge 14 schools in 2006 resulted in rallies in front of the central office, petitions by families to start their own district, and a one-day attendance boycott at one of the marked schools, which cost the district \$8,000 in attendance revenue.

Diane Bukowski writes for the Michigan Citizen.

Advisers need good counsel

*By Meliqueica Meadows
Special to Sentinel-Voice*

ST. LOUIS (NNPA) - Mark Pope, an experienced therapist, knew he encountered something truly original when students were clamoring to get into a class.

"Because of the response of students, we have to offer it at least once a year," said Pope, chair of the Department of Counseling and Family Therapy at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

He was talking about Counseling the African-American Client, which is being taught for the first time by Professor Angela Coker.

Twenty-three students initially enrolled in a nine-day pilot course and Coker, assistant professor in the College of Education, said she had to turn people away.

Techniques and insights for dealing with African-American clients are sorely lacking in many graduate-level counseling programs. "The higher you go in education, the whiter it gets," Coker said. In particular, Coker added, people of color are "not represented in Jung, Freud or Adler's theories."

"Black people, as a group, have been subjugated and invisible in terms of psychology," said Coker. "Historically in psychology, Black people were never studied unless it was to illustrate a negative point."

Through the course, Coker hopes to provide students with an understanding of the psychological development of African-American clients while delving into multicultural issues in counseling and therapeutic strategies for reaching the Black community, which is underserved by the mental health industry.

Elizabeth Clay, an elementary school counselor at Dewey International Studies School, said when she learned of this class, she "couldn't pass it up."

"I work with girls groups, African-American males and staff who don't know how to work with our kids," Clay said, adding that she hopes the work will "enhance what I am doing" in the St. Louis Public Schools.

Coker said she hopes students come away with "a better sense of self-awareness about how they feel about African-American people."

"Many of our students come from sheltered backgrounds," she said. "You need to like and respect the people you serve."

Key issues, according to Coker, include the social stigma of mental health services and a cultural mistrust about counseling in the Black community. A lack of Black counselors, few counseling centers in Black communities and financial limitations are all barriers that prevent many African-Americans from voluntarily seeking services.

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Minn. churches plan to mix races

*By Schultz Felecia
Special to Sentinel-Voice*
MINNEAPOLIS (NNPA)

— Reverend William Hayden Smith is leading a charge that's the first of its kind in the Twin Cities area. The ordained African Methodist Episcopal minister is working to partner two separate Christian denominations, which historically consist of two separate races — Blacks and Whites — into one sanctuary.

It is a joint venture between the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). The two denominations will keep their autonomy but will practice their weekly church services together — a lesson that has a profound effect far outside the church walls.

Rev. Smith coined the concept as an "interracial marriage."

"Families today are made up of different cultures," said Rev. Smith. "We want to do the same but provide a model at an institutional level that eventually will serve as an example to help strengthen communities of different cultures."

Historically, the AME

church served African-Americans during slavery to help educate and uplift freed Africans to become self-sufficient. AME is the largest African-American denomination but has never been exclusive to African-Americans. It is an international faith that also serves several districts in Africa today.

The ELCA church originally was formed to serve and strengthen survivors of religious repression. ELCA has primarily served European and White communities and more recently has embraced a mission to reach out to different ethnicities.

According to Smith, the two faiths have attractive qualities that could complement each other well.

"The greatest thing that impressed me about the Lutheran Church is their focus on Christ and their commitment to serving one another. In the African-American community, we need to learn how to work together on a mission basis. I think African-Americans have the commitment but not necessarily the model to carry out that commitment like the Lutherans."

Smith notes that the

ELCA will likely admire AME's sincere and deeply rooted worship style and perhaps incorporate it into some of their own worship services.

Making this partnership even more unique is the two denominations' plan to practice their faith in the predominantly White suburb of Apple Valley. Never before has an AME church existed in a White suburb.

Currently, the two denominations hold Bible study classes at the Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Apple Valley on Thursday evenings from 7 to 9 pm. Once the congregation grows large enough, the new church hopes to pool enough resources to construct their own place of worship in Apple Valley.

Rev. Smith accepted this charge under the direction of Presiding Elder Alphonse Reff, who oversees all AME churches in Minnesota, as well as four in Iowa. While the joint venture is a single effort locally, it was inspired by a national effort in the 1990s that later stalled.

"We're picking up where that left off," said Smith. "I understand that this is very

ambitious. It involves much more than swapping ministers and choirs."

However, with the blessing of leadership from both churches and interest from the local community, Rev. Smith's charge could help create a multicultural church community, helping to loosen history's sharp divide.

Schultz Felecia writes for the Spokesman-Recorder.



LET FREEDOM SING

Songstress Aretha Harden performs a solo during the musical "Gospel Explosion-Freedom Rings... So We Sing" on Sunday at the West Las Vegas Library Theatre.

Photo special to the Sentinel-Voice by John Broussard