

## Ignoring what we must do

Longtime CMS critic upbraids governor for not seeing why many black kids are being left behind

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# Teaching tuned-out teens: 'It's simple, really'

This summer I committed to do some teaching. And like countless others before me, I felt in desperate need of professional development. Still do!

I turned to my friend and mentor Robert Knisely, who retired out of the federal Senior Executive Service and teaches teens at the St. Alban's School for Public Service in Washington, D.C.

And of course I didn't even know what to ask, so I inquired what the attention span of the young earthling is these days.

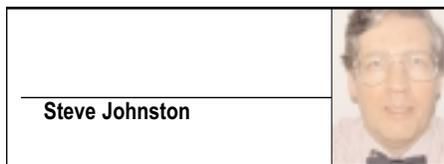
Bob's answer is full of life and hope and good sense. And challenge to all of us. Here's what he wrote:

"My experience teaching the young has been limited to 17- year-olds, with an occasional 16- or 18-year-old thrown in. In my experience, the length of their attention spans is MY problem as a teacher, and hence yours. You must be as interesting as a video game; I recommend dealing in unlikely insights.

"One such that might be useful to a newswriting class is 'Sending lettuce by rabbit.' Look at who is saying what, and if their actions are in line with their interests in the matter. This was expressed by Elliot Richardson as, 'Where you stand depends on where you sit.'

"Another is, 'There are no new problems.' Humans are much better at stealing solutions from others than at making up new solutions. Ergo, if you can analogize your problem sideways, you may find that someone else has already found a solution. Santayana: 'He who doesn't understand history is bound to repeat it.'

"Perhaps my favorite is, 'In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice – but in practice there is.' Many of my former students quote this to me as my mantra. As you might imagine,



Steve Johnston

it's been very useful in explaining why governments' attempts at problem-solving often are not totally successful.

"Your students will know (little or no) history, and therefore cannot extrapolate into the future, since they have only one point of reference, the present. They do not understand complexity, having little experience with it, and having (seldom or) never been presented with second-order consequences. They have not had to think about who will do what when whomever does what first. Kurdish autonomy comes to mind, as does Cindy Sheahan. They have been sheltered from the consequences of their actions since their first cry (they were not hit) and their first step (they were not allowed to walk into anything sharp).

"In all of these things they are exactly like all prior editions of homo sapiens, not being blessed with instinctive reactions to events around them, from tigers to talk shows. As my (saint-

ed) father said, humans have only two instinctive responses, to suck at almost anything, and to clutch at almost anything when they sense they are falling. Both have been very useful through the millennia, and perhaps the lost instincts have been worth the tradeoff for additional program-mable memory.

"I have been complimented a number of times for treating teenagers as if they were adults; thus usually from adults. I have been complimented by teens for treating them as adults. The difference is self-explanatory.

"The best advice for teaching is the same best advice I ever heard for raising children. You are taking them down a road that you have been on before, but they have not. Period. Treat them as being as intelligent, and as thoughtful, and as caring, as you would hope to be. And show them the road.

"It's simple, really."



Knisely

First-day enrollment			
District	2004	2005	Increase
CMS	111,179	116,994	5,815
Wake	108,353	114,375	6,022

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**People:** Lucy Bush Carter, vice president; Steve Johnston, executive director and *Educate!* editor. Assisting with this edition: Stephanie Southworth.

# Governor doesn't get what ails schools

By **GYASI A. FOLUKE**

"Americans," said the late Sir Winston Churchill, "will eventually do the right thing, but only after they have tried everything else first" – a statement made after he had attempted and failed to persuade the U.S. to enter World War II with Britain or against Adolph Hitler.

Clearly, this partial truism may be observed after recent news reports that Gov. Mike Easley has proposed to send state teams to assist certain low-performing Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS). For state officials and CMS apparently believe, falsely, that they have "tried everything else" to improve education in low-performing schools. As stated by Easley, "These schools have consistently performed poorly and I want to know why." Duh!

Question: Are we to believe that "our" Governor does not know why these "high-poverty" schools are not performing up to par? Well, maybe he doesn't, just as our "distinguished" (sic) CMS school board and their top administrators appear to be equally lost for answers to this problem.

However, we must question whether or not they are really "lost" or, perhaps like most Americans, they are palpably uninformed about our authentic Black history that, tragically, is not taught in "our" public schools.

Moreover, perhaps the Governor and CMS are in denial, psychologically, about MAJOR under-estimated DAMAGES, both economic and psychological, that the majority society has inflicted upon Africans in America, sometimes called African Americans, and/or they do not understand another simple truism, perhaps best stated by Professor Roger Wilkins – to wit: "We can't have equal outcomes for children whose parents face dreadfully unequal circumstances in this life." Bingo! Amen!

Indeed, if "mediocrity in education is no longer an option,"

## The author

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according to the Governor, then he and CMS must face, not simply low-performing poverty schools, per se, but grossly disproportionate Black POVERTY, period, about 51% in Mecklenburg County, in contrast to about 12% for Whites.

And this gross wealth disparity, distinctly but not absolutely related to academic disparities, is traceable to the ugly reality that Black wealth or resources have been stolen for nearly 400 years in this nation that, allegedly, promotes "liberty and justice for all" – or is it "just us" White folks?

Moreover, adding insult to injury, this economic disparity is aggravated by a paucity of vision and the failure to implement more successful educational strategies by the state and CMS "educators," the latter who continue to receive large financial bonuses for perpetuating "academic genocide" (Judge Howard Manning) on our Black students.

And now, "our" so-called "permanent government" in Charlotte – the corporate bosses, metaphorically "the boys in the plantation big house" – are spending "big bucks," allegedly to "re-structure" CMS, although it appears that their major objective has been completed, i.e., to get rid of Dr. James Pughley, quietly, "the Charlotte way."

But all of the proposed "re-structuring" notwithstanding, nothing of substance will change within CMS until our "educators" and state government adopt more

viable educational strategies and the corporate-political leadership in this area began to "re-structure" their socioeconomic priorities – not necessarily providing "more money" for "educators," but MUCH "more money" to repair damages (reparations) inflicted perennially on Black Americans.

Of course, in the unlikely event that this leadership will even consider embracing this suggestion, we should prepare ourselves to hear lots of whining about "no money" and "high taxes" about which we heard so little when "the permanent government" and their political lackeys decided to spend millions of dollars on a sports arena, other major projects, and now on a museum for dead race-car drivers.

So, who cares about the "living" poor? Of course, "we" will simply send their sons and daughters to prison or to Iraq to serve as "cannon fodder," as they die in disproportionate numbers (22%) for "our

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Foluke

## Showhouse benefits Advocates

Proceeds from tours of a 7,800 square foot, \$2.2 million Lake Norman showhouse will benefit local nonprofit Charlotte Advocates for Education. The address is 15515 Jetton Rd. In addition to special events, tour hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 1-5 p.m. Sundays and 11-6 on Labor Day. Tickets at the door are \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and free for teachers. Tours run through Sept. 11.

## Foluke

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freedom” – or is it the oil wealth of those “compassionate conservatives,” a contradiction of terms, who claim to believe in “affirmative access,” never defined, in lieu of affirmative action.

Fortunately, there is no mystery about what needs to be done to improve educational strategies. For some of us have proposed to the school board and top administrators many measures to reform “our” schools – all to no avail.

Indeed, we should now be convinced that CMS officials are afflicted tragically with “The Ostrich Syndrome,” having chosen, metaphorically, to bury their heads in the sand, while ignoring obvious racial implications underlying volumes of school data. Indeed, we need major reforms in CMS to change:

(1) The Euro-centric curriculum that, subconsciously, teaches Black students to worship White people – like that artistic rendition of “Jesus,” in reality Michelangelo’s cousin, in our churches – while Blacks simultaneously learn to hate themselves;

(2) Academic teaching, student “tracking” and tests, while concurrently addressing those despicable gaps on test scores;

(3) Unfair punitive practices to reduce punishment rates, retention rates and drop-out or “push-out” rates;

(4) The grossly disproportionate number of White teachers, mostly female and most often racially biased, at least subconsciously;

(5) The failure to provide

## Payoff for students from parent involvement

“We know that one thing that keeps parents from being involved is their discomfort with schools. And that discomfort often stems from parents not knowing how to be involved. Schools with a commitment to parent involvement take an active role in helping parents learn a variety of ways to be involved. The benefits for students are proven: A recent review of parent involvement research found that parent-child reading activities produce a significant improvement in children’s language and reading skills from preschool through high school... another study finds a strong positive effect on student achievement when parents work with students on homework.”

– From “Meeting the Challenge: Getting Parents Involved in Schools” in the August newsletter of The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, [www.centerforcsri.org](http://www.centerforcsri.org)

authentic professional education to teachers on African American heritage-culture, beginning with ancient Africa, “The Cradle of Civilization”;

(6) The failure to assign “quality teachers” where most needed, although generally they are non-existent within CMS, if they have not learned Black heritage-culture; and finally

(7) CMS should adopt several new strategies, including supplemental African-centered educational centers or magnet schools, to address special needs (damages) of “disadvantaged” Black parents and students, based upon the most important “Polyglot Factor,” the uniqueness of “the Black experience” in America, etc., ad nauseam.

In conclusion and tragically, I can discern nothing on the educational or political horizon to provide a meaningful sense of hope to most Black families and students who, continually, are being abused and destroyed under this

despicable, genocidal Euro-centric system of mis-education.

Moreover, I can see nothing now or on the horizon to refute the wisdom of the late “Honorable” Elijah Muhammad; that is, “Those who do not treat you right cannot be expected to teach you right.”

Therefore, Governor Easley, “the permanent government” and CMS officials should heed the message of a most relevant African proverb – to wit: “If a dead tree falls, it takes a live one with it.”

For many other students will “fall” or fail also if our allegedly “low performing” Blacks students continue to fail, abysmally, with the dominant “society” paying “the cost to be the boss.”

And then, perhaps, all of us will better understand, retrospectively – “too little and too late” – that “mediocrity in education is not an option.”

Hotep (Peace)!

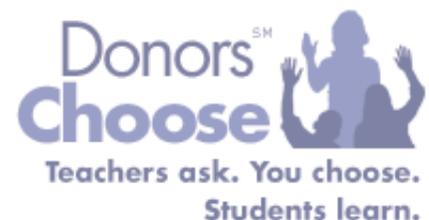
## Double your money for classroom projects

DonorsChoose was recognized with the Amazon Nonprofit Innovation Award this summer. The top prize: A dollar-for-dollar match of money raised through Sept. 30 to the group that raises more than nine other prize finalists.

DonorsChoose has directed

\$67,000 toward CMS as individuals agreed to finance projects proposed by teachers. Donations from the Charlotte community will go back to CMS projects.

Further information on how to make a donation is available at [donorschoose.org](http://donorschoose.org).



# Are we listening to the experts in high school reform?

*An excerpt from “Students as Co-constructors of the Learning Experience and Environment: Youth Engagement and High School Reform” by Francine Joselowsky, in the summer 2005 edition of Voices in Urban Education.*

One of the most important assets schools and school systems have in redesigning high schools are in schools every day: the students themselves. Yet, few districts engage youth effectively.

“What’s wrong with the American high school? If you ask students in high schools across the country what they think about their school, they’re likely to get to the heart of the matter, distilling poor test scores, low graduation rates, and high teacher turnover into a few profound words that hint at boredom, alienation, and lack of purpose. In preliminary results from the National Governors Association’s Rate Your Future survey, designed to give students a voice in the organization’s education reform conversation, a third of the 1,200 student respondents say they feel overlooked by their high schools, while 43 percent don’t believe they are gaining practical and essential life skills in high school (NGA 2005).

“None of this should be surprising. Students have been telling adults what they think for years; but often their words get lost in the race to improve test scores and end up only as headlines in newspaper articles, foundation reports, and legislative speeches. Herein lies the paradox: adults want to hear what students have to say but feel that they – the adults – are best equipped to decide how to meet those needs.

“Take, for example, the recent tensions and allegedly race-related fights between students at Jefferson High School in South Central Los Angeles. With 3,800 students on a year-round, three-track system, this comprehensive

high school designed for 1,800 students has struggled with overcrowding, depersonalization, and low test scores for years. The response of the district and the city to the violence has been to deploy a heavy police presence and turn the school into a de facto lockdown facility, vowing to beef up security in the long term. But these tensions are not new to the students, who have often voiced their concerns and frustrations.

“In a workshop last summer on developing youth-engagement strategies, students, teachers, and a small learning community coordinator from Jefferson expressed their concerns about the lack of student voice and developed an action plan to take back to their school to share with teachers and administrators. These students, who had never before been formally engaged in their school in any way, developed a plan to survey students and then present the collated information to teachers and administrators. Their goal was to motivate students and

encourage them to become involved in their school and their education. As a priority, they highlighted the need for racial integration and a better physical environment in order to improve education and graduation rates.

“However, when they returned to their school and presented their suggestions to administrators, they were dismissed. Instead, administrators developed their own strategy and brought – unannounced – a group of hand-picked students to a teachers’ meeting to tell teachers what they were doing wrong. This left many teachers feeling attacked and defensive. Had administrators taken up the original student suggestions, they might have been able to identify the existing tensions and issues and develop strategies to address them before they escalated and eventually exploded.”

– [www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/summer05/Joselowsky.html](http://www.annenberginstitute.org/VUE/summer05/Joselowsky.html)

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## Briefly...

**No Child law:** A study of the federal No Child Left Behind law found that 21 states are considering implementing legislation overriding NCLB, the Christian Science Monitor reported.

[www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)

**Less sugar:** The Coca-Cola and Pepsi companies have agreed to stop supplying full-calorie carbonated drinks in Philadelphia middle school vending machines, the Inquirer told its readers. The companies will still place fruit juice and water in the machines.

[www.philly.com](http://www.philly.com)

**Expectations:** The Anne Arundel County, Md., school district agreed to raise its academic expectations of minorities and the disabled, the Baltimore Sun reported. The decision was in

response to a complaint by black community leaders. The complaint, filed against Supt. Eric Smith and the school board, said the board was not addressing a continuing black-white gap in achievement scores, and claimed that black students were disproportionately placed in special education.

[www.baltimoresun.com](http://www.baltimoresun.com)

**Girls only:** The N.C. School of Science and Mathematics has created an introductory computer class for girls only, to increase enrollment by girls, the News and Observer told its readers. The paper quoted UCLA researcher Jane Margolis as saying, “Girls don’t want to ask questions that boys will think are silly, or they think it’s too late for them to catch up.” It is hoped that if girls know there won’t be any boys in the class, that more will register.

[www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com)