

## Minneapolis NAACP silent on school issues

Written by Bill English, Student Advocate  
Friday, 09 November 2012 11:51

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Recently, Booker Hodges, President of the Minneapolis NAACP wrote an op-ed piece in another publication condemning Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) in general on the continuing achievement gap for African-American students. Hodges' views were severely critical of the Superintendent, Dr. Bernadeia Johnson.

Hodges is entitled to opinions but he cannot make up his own facts. As a frequent school board meeting attendee and as a long term education advocate for our students I offer the following facts for consideration.

Despite the lingering gap some progress is evident in improving graduation rates and test scores. However neither the increase in graduation rates or improvement in math and reading scores are satisfactory to our superintendent. She has led the district in education reforms and implemented evidenced-based strategies that have proved successful in other districts. Specifically she has implemented effective teacher and principal evaluation systems. Professional development for teachers has emphasized professional learning communities and individual learning plans for students.

Johnson has led the district's implementation of focused instruction and improved both math and reading strategies across the district. These are only a few examples of the superintendent's leadership in addressing the academic results of MPS students.

This superintendent has made recruiting and training of transformational school leaders a high priority in her administration. Her partnership with Harvest Preparatory Schools (one of the most effective charter school in the country) is revolutionary in Minnesota. All of these strategies are being implemented in a very transparent manner. The trajectory for MPS's students of color is in the right direction and we need constructive criticism and partnerships rather than the slanted misinformed opinions offered in Hodges' op-ed piece.

That article raises interesting questions on the role of the local NAACP on issues of education. The need for substantial reform in public education has been at the forefront in Minneapolis for several years. The African American Leadership Forum (AALF), Put Kids First and the Coalition of Black Churches have led the push for effective reforms in Minnesota. Where was our local NAACP on these issues? The fact is it was largely silent. Issues like alternative certification and ending "last in and first out" where efforts to bring national reforms to Minnesota were fought at the legislature without the support of the Minneapolis NAACP.

Last year during MPS's negotiations with the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, the issue of providing extended day and extended school year for our high priority schools was being contested and our NAACP was silent. While organizations like those mentioned earlier were asking the school board not to approve the contract without those changes the NAACP was not present. There has been no evidence of our NAACP supporting Harvest Prep, Hiawatha Learning Academies; all outstanding charter schools that are effectively educating our children.

It appears to this writer that President Hodges is once again wrongheaded in his opinions. While nationally the NAACP has supported the kind of reforms we have advocated our local branch has been silent.

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What is needed is for the NAACP to join with others in this struggle to improve outcomes for our students. MPS and Superintendent Johnson have been receptive to constructive criticism and engagement by all of the stakeholders. It would be helpful if in our op-ed pieces we offer constructive advice. The proverbial, "it takes a village to raise a child" is still valid. We need the NAACP and its leadership to join organizations such as AALF, Put Kids First, the Coalition of Black Churches, the Minnesota Business Partnership in pushing for the reforms that will enable MPS and Superintendent Johnson to achieve the objective of making all MPS students graduating college ready.