

The Broward Times

FCAT Debacle May Be A Good Thing

By Keith A. Clayborne

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This newspaper has always attempted to be the voice for those whose voices were ignored. To be an advocate for those that did not have the wherewithal to defend themselves. To be a beacon of light in this community. To raise the critical issues as we informed the community of the other side, oftentimes, the less popular side of the issue. We've always sought to be relevant and to tell it like it is. In the coming weeks we will continue this tradition as we cover two current and controversial issues; the FCAT and the filing of a lawsuit against the Superintendent of Broward County schools and School Board members by 18 black, mostly school administrators. Over the past two weeks, there has been several protest demonstrations against the FCAT, mainly in Dade County. Even the beleaguered and dormant Ft. Lauderdale NAACP got involved in the FCAT fray. While we may not agree with all the positions taken by the varied and sundry people and groups, we commend them for having an interest, getting involved and taking a position on behalf of our children.

Our concern with the FCAT protests is what is being implied by the protesters and that the protesters are not providing any real and practical alternatives to evaluating the performance of students or how to raise their level of achievement. Are we concerned that Florida ranks 49th in this country in the achievement of students? When students perform well on the FCAT, school administrators and teachers take all the credit. They detail their educational strategies and techniques, document their hard work and long hours, but when students perform poorly, not only do they not accept any responsibility; they totally blame the students for not being motivated and for having poor study habits. They blame the parents for not helping their children and for not showing more interest. They claim that their poor results are because of them having large numbers of LEP and ESE students in their schools; that is students who are not proficient in English and who have learning disabilities. Parents and other critics want us to believe that their children will not be promoted to 4th grade because they failed to pass the reading portion of the FCAT when it was given in March. We were not told that there are four or five other alternatives to being promoted, other than the FCAT. Students can get promoted to 4th grade if they make a certain score on the following tests: National Norm Referenced Test (NRT), Stanford 9, IRI, STAR, or the test that will be given at end of the Summer Reading Camp. In addition, schools can also recommend promotion based on the student's portfolio and performance in the classroom. How many parents of the failing students made sure that their children attended the FCAT camps that schools held before school, after school and on Saturdays? How many parents monitored the progress their children were making on the FCAT practice tests and made their children turn off the television and open up the books? Those students who attended school in Broward County since the 10th grade had six opportunities to take and pass the FCAT. They also have the opportunity take the FCAT until they pass it. How unreasonable is the FCAT when 12th grade students are only required to pass a 10th grade exam by answering no more than 40% of the questions

correctly? Black youth must be educated and expected to compete and survive in a global world. While we believe in standards for students, we also believe in standards for educators and school systems. In order for students to learn and perform well, they must have competent teachers and administrators. They must have the proper, appropriate and necessary educational resources and supplies. They need parents who are involved, supportive and who will monitor their progress and advocate for them constantly. And when the parents can't or won't do these things, then the very civil rights and social organizations and churches who are now protesting the FCAT must take on that role. Where were these people and groups when CCC filed a lawsuit and this newspaper fought to have competent teachers and administrators; for current text books, updated computers and equal resources in predominately black schools just a few years ago. Because we knew this day of reckoning was coming. It didn't just happen - Gov. Bush has been telling and preparing us for this day for 4 years.

While we applaud the 18 people that filed a lawsuit against the school board for standing up for themselves and against the injustices they feel they were subjected to, we have been informed that some of them were reprimanded, demoted, or forced out of the school system because of complaints by black parents and black staff for incompetence and treating them with disrespect, retaliation, harassment and unfairness. We have been informed that other black school board employees have named some of them in employment complaints and lawsuits. For many years, the school board never took action against school board administrators. Administrators were a protected group that were allowed to perform with incompetence, run rough shod over other black people; mistreat and demean black students, staff and parents. Now administrators and managers are finally being held equally accountable for their actions and performance. Even though, the school board's action against some of the 18 people listed in the lawsuit may have been legitimate, we are aware that the disciplinary actions against others were politically motivated, retaliatory, and unfair. We do not need to support people that do not deserve to be supported and we need to put the full force of our support behind those that deserve to be supported.

Those who have taken risks and stood up for and with black children, black staff, black parents, black businesses, and the black community. Nevertheless, we are very concerned with disparate treatment in the school system. Are black administrators and other black staff treated differently from white administrators and other white staff when the circumstances and situations are the same and similar? We feel that they are and will be reporting more on this issue and the FCAT debate in the weeks to come.