

Editorial

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The following was written by Alder Brian Solomon. He presented it to the community at the Allied Accountability Awards.

Do You Know Us?

Can you see us?
 Are we too conspicuous?
 Or just invisible strangers on the bus
 The kind you ponder – from a safe distance
 Viewing through the tiny aperture
 That is your lens.

If you took the time,
 And cleansed the images – the biased, filtered, second-hand
 Images, you might see something else.
 Perhaps, instead of mere indifference, you'd see benevolence
 Instead of insolence, you'd see intelligence
 And maybe, if you looked hard enough, you'd see
 Resilience, confidence and reverence
 And not just turbulence.

Yeah, we got poverty baby, welcome. Welcome to the uncomfortable
 World of drugs and thugs, mug shots and litterbugs
 Welcome to the racism, classism, and a dozen more isms you thought
 were history
 Hidden away in some distant vault
 Welcome too to the world of blame and fault, of sexual assault, of victims
 and poverty,
 Child abuse and mental health
 Complex layers where wealth, dwell'th not.

Welcome the hunger and fear, landlords preying like wolves, apartments
 that are deplorable.
 Let's be clear. This may be a frontier for you, but not for us here.
 Can you hear?

Can you hear us? Can you hear the silent screams for help?
 Can you hear our children? Or do you just hear the gunshots
 The fiery hot cheap shots that define our daily lives.
 It is not all noise coming from here.

It's children in school, people in work, networks and teamwork,
 People coming together, laying the groundwork, for something bigger,
 something better
 Something that doesn't sweep it under the rug and just say forget her
 But rings a bell of justice that doesn't just occur,
 But endures.

Does it sound cliché?
 Does it make you insecure? We're not just a caricature – but did you
 know that?

Do you know us? Do you know who we really are?
 If you want to know us, know us, know our strength
 Know our passion, know our drive and energy and
 Survival fire burning stronger than you can imagine, than no, brother
 You can't do it from there.
 You can't know our despair from your armchair, can't see the disrepair
 through the glare,
 Or really be, in any way, aware.

Do you know us? Or just judge us, based on what you read and hear
 Based on preconceived notions, half-truth potions, and another world
 Your world, safely nestled somewhere far across the ocean.

Brother, we are more than what you see and hear
 More than what you think you know
 More than violence.

Can you hear that silence?
 Listen carefully, beyond the catastrophe and calamity.
 Listen instead, to the humanity.

And watch us soar.



Crisis in Wisconsin's Schools

by Bill Breitsprecher

Wisconsin has the largest gap in academic achievement between majority and non-majority students in the country. Reading and math skills of some groups of students are among the lowest in the nation.

African American and Hispanic American communities are especially hard-hit. A recent study finds that the standards Wisconsin uses to assess proficiency in reading and math are among the lowest in the nation.

This is unacceptable and unsustainable. While these issues exist across America, they are especially bad in Wisconsin and its only "major league" city, Milwaukee, which has some of the highest unemployment and poverty rates in the nation. Only Detroit has a higher unemployment rate.

Across America, 1 out of every 6 children lives in poverty, by far the highest rate of any the world's wealthy nations. In Milwaukee, 2 out of 5 children live in poverty. This is the 7th highest concentration of poor families in this nation's urban centers. But high rates of poverty are not just in Milwaukee.

In a recent visit to Madison, Marc Moriel, President and CEO of the National Urban League, released the appalling statistic that 80% of all infants of color born in Madison are born into poverty! We can find these issues in other Wisconsin communities too. Low expectations and highly concentrated poverty and unemployment in any community create a recipe for disaster.

Today's students need effective reading, math, critical thinking, and information and technology literacy skills. Public schools are failing to serve some student, especially children in urban communities with high concentrations of poverty. According to the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, a conservative think tank that has advocated for school choice for almost twenty years, the "choice" schools are not working either.

There is no "quick fix" that will reform schools. Many believe that the factors that create dysfunctional schools are largely outside of what schools can influence. The lowest performing schools in America are in communities with high poverty and unemployment.

All children deserve "schools that work" and this needs to be more than a slogan on bumper stickers. Can we wait for rational, effective, long-term solutions?

The experience, specialty-training, and hope that I want to share is that even while we struggle with issues relating to school improvements - parents and communities can make a difference and can help children be successful.

The good news is that studies demonstrate that the greatest factors predicting a child's success in schools are early literacy skills - a "readiness to read."

If we can help families nurture these pre-reading skills in a child's early years, before they enter preschool or Kindergarten, kids will start school as ready as possible and with fundamental skills that provide a foundation for reading, writing, and all other academic subject areas.

The good news is that with the right support and commitments, we can share these skills at libraries, churches, through social groups like our neighborhood associations and organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club Allied Family Center and programs of the Urban League.

To learn more about helping children succeed in school, please visit the website I have created and maintain to promote early literacy skills:

www.earlyliteracyweb.com

Please help share "ready to read" skills with children - the costs are low and the rewards are high. Even better news - WE CAN HAVE A LOT OF FUN DOING IT TOO!



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