

# THE PEOPLES FORUM

## A meaningless piece of paper and nowhere to go

To the editor:

While we celebrate the 50th anniversary of Brown vs. The Board of Education and marvel at the success, it is ironic, after half a century, that so many of today's students will not graduate this June. Our society will blame it on not passing the SOL's, but no one thing is to blame. I contend that just as prior to the ruling of Brown vs. the Board of Education came about, that the same entities still exist. Not racial segregation. No, we conquered that, but our schools remain separate and all students still are not created as equals.

This June, various students will march across a stage as if to actually be graduating from the school in which they attend. Some will graduate with diplomas and some will receive Certificates of Attendance. Those who receive those certificates will actually have attended the entire four years of high school, may have possibly made very good grades, but will have not passed the SOL's. This cannot, in the mind of anyone, seem legitimate or fair. Especially, when the students are expected to pass SOL's from a school that is not even accredited.

How do we celebrate the anniversary of Brown vs. the Board of Education when our children are coming out of schools with a piece of paper of lesser value than the one that was obtained in segregated schools. Of course it was a milestone for that time, for that era. It was wonderful to finally have the assurance of equal education. But, I beg to differ. Education, although finally integrated, is still not equal.

Although our schools are racially integrated, they still remain segregated. In the case of Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, the U.S. Supreme Court ended federally sanctioned racial segregation in the public schools by ruling unanimously that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

A look back allows us to see where predominately white schools had materials and opportunities that African-American schools did not have. Once the case was won, we felt that if we were all in the same school, we would have the same things. But, we are not all in the same schools and separate education continues. For instance, how many children in the public schools are offered the opportunities to travel to France, Germany, etc? Not many. How many children that attend the Governor's School are afforded that opportunity? Because there is a separate school that offers a separate education to other children that are not offered in the public schools, we are more in violation of Brown vs. the Board of Education ruling. Until all children are offered the same opportunities, we do not know if all of the children can excel or not. Children in special education are not afforded the same opportunities as those in the Governor's School, and some of them have the highest of IQs. Why? They are different than the "average" child, yet no special provisions were made to build a school for them. Why are they not getting the foreign languages like those in the Governor's schools. The ruling did not state that "separate educational facilities based on race only was unequal." It states that separate educational facilities are unequal. How can we justify offering some classes to others and not to everyone? How can we justify putting those with a higher IQ in one building and leaving others behind? Thurgood Marshall stated that "Segregation generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the communi-

ty that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to ever be undone." Although Mr. Marshall's statement was in reference to the races, the same principle applies. What more are expected of our students when the only expectations are for those in the Governor's School or in a higher learning bracket. For instance, how do you explain to a child in a school that he has not been afforded the opportunity to go to Jamestown with other children in his school because he is not in the GATE program. Does he not need to learn Virginia History as well? Do we actually expect those at the other schools to excel as well as we expect those in the Governor's Schools and if so, then why aren't they given the same opportunity to try?

This is not a letter to degrade the efforts of those involved with the Governor's School. Their work is evident in the results of the students. This letter is intended to ask the school system to look at what is happening to the students who will get certificates of attendance. These students can't even join the military with this certificate. A GED holds more credibility than this certificate. Although it is primarily because they don't pass the SOL's, the blame

goes further than that. Perhaps, like in the days of segregation, had these same children been afforded the same opportunities as other children, namely those in the Governor's School, they could have possibly passed the SOL's.

How can anyone say, "No Child Left Behind," when you are getting ready to leave so very many behind.

How will they get jobs? How will they excel in life? How will they ever gain their independence in life, with

nothing to fall back on. The Educational System in this school has failed our children. Look at the bigger picture and you will see that a great number of children are about to be dismissed from high school with a meaningless piece of paper and nowhere to go. Parents, please, if your child is going to receive a one of the non-functional certificates of attendance because your child did not pass the SOL's, there is a group who is willing to assist you in fighting for your child. That group is Just Children, a Children's Advocacy program of the Legal Aid Justice Center. In Petersburg you can call 862-2205, or toll free in Richmond at 1-800-496-0365. They deserve more than a certificate of attendance. They deserve the education your tax dollars paid for and they deserve to have proof of more than just attending school.

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