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Children Need Access To Quality Public Education

Written by Robert Woodard

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At Woodard's Barbershop, located at 5031 Diamond St. in Wynnefield, conversations play a strong role in solving problems. One of which involves the sale of Public Schools.

If you lived in your community long enough, you probably attended the same public schools your parents and grand-parents did in your neighborhood. These schools shape you as an adult. My middle school was Barratt Junior High School at 16th and Wharton streets. The name was suddenly changed to George W. Childs School. Taking away the name takes away its history and memories. One of which was a visit from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1967. I was proud to know that my school was the only one he visited in Philadelphia. Sadly, it was just a few months before his assassination.

Yes, schools play a big role in the past, present and future of a child's life. Question, what happens to children and adults whose schools have been sold or the name has been changed? This leads me to the first school I attended with my mother, learning how to speak and recite my ABCs, so I could learn to read.

Just think, not so long ago, "slaves" were forbidden to learn how to read. Hence, the same spirit that punished you if you were caught with a book is the same spirit that segregated you after you were freed to read. I thank King for bringing integration to our nation, but the hatred it brought was devastating. Now that we have earned the right to go to the same schools as whites, it did not mean you would receive an equal education.

Statistics speak for them-selves in our public schools. Large numbers of public school students have graduated with academic diplomas, only to find out that they were not academic material for college. Thousands have graduated with this problem that affects them as adults. It makes you think is this the same spirit that is affecting the education of the "children of slaves" today. Without a proper education, only two words can follow, "prison" or "poverty."

The history of the public school should never be forgotten. If a school is sold, it should still have some educational history for future communities. There will always be businessmen ready to purchase prime real estate, but when there is a sale of a school, it should have a "community help clause" attached to it. The clause would require the buyer to open an "educational rehabilitation center" that would serve the community.

Helping to make a better future starts with cleaning not just the streets, but cleaning up the educational damage done to our under-educated citizens in their communities. Acknowledging that the public schools were not the best schools and trying to do something about it is a good start. Keeping school records in place, upon the sale of a school, will help us to find the answers to most problems.

Testing students to see what they have learned in public schools is key. There is now a new test called the Keystone Exam. This tests for higher scores in each subject matter, but if they do not pass, they will not receive a diploma.

There were many students before this test that graduated high school, barely able to read, only to fail trying to reach their life goals. Today with the new Keystone Exam, if a public school student fails, they will receive a "certificate of attendance," which is worth nothing.

In today's society, we have to find ways to help those who graduated with diplomas from Philadelphia public high schools, yet did not get the proper education to help them function in today's world. The business community along with the city, state and government, can help by creating a continual campaign to over-come "functional illiteracy" by opening "educational rehabilitation centers" in the schools that are chosen to be sold.

Reading, writing and arithmetic, are basic skills needed, technology skills can come later. Without education, you're like a slave on a plantation waiting to be freed. "Involuntary servitude" is not legal anymore, so in order to get paid legally in a capitalist society, you have to have basic educational skills to survive.

'Statistics, according to the 2013 Fall Guide of the "The Notebook," shows that a majority of the "Neighborhood High Schools," produced the lowest graduation rates for 2012. (<http://thenotebook.org/sites/default/files/2013-high-school-data.pdf>)

For example, West Philadelphia — Promise Academy produced 55 percent non-graduates of its student population. Sadly, statistics make sure we understand where the real power lies. The real power lies on how you are educated. It is your right, as an American citizen, to receive a proper education. With education, wisdom is born, with wisdom, comes understanding.

Ignorance divides and with division, the human race can only fail. Success creates itself, when we as "a race," see ourselves as "one."

Robert Woodard "The Wynnefield Barber" wrote this column.