



89 of 137 DOCUMENTS

Copyright 1999 The Baltimore Sun Company
THE BALTIMORE SUN

July 3, 1999, Saturday ,FINAL

SECTION: EDITORIAL ,15A SATURDAY MAILBOX

LENGTH: 3034 words

BODY:

Public schools should invest in their young instructors

As a middle school teacher who is leaving the Baltimore school system this summer to move to Tennessee, I had a mixed reaction to The Sun's article "Baltimore fires 278 teachers" (June 24).

On the one hand, it is good to see that the city has finally gotten up the guts to challenge the union and get rid of some teachers. City schools harbor hundreds of poor teachers who remain simply because the union seems too strong to confront.

At the same time, I am concerned over the fact that most of the teachers fired were new to the city and uncertified. How does the city expect to attract new teachers if they fear being fired after their first year?

I joined the ranks of city teachers 3 years ago, uncertified, through the Teach for America program. My first year was long and difficult, but overall I enjoyed my experience and will miss my students and colleagues immensely. I will not, however, miss the poorly run city school system.

The first year of teaching is always a challenge, but in the city system many things make it almost impossible, including poor curriculum, poor student achievement and lack of parental and administrative support.

I know that many first-year teachers feel like they are drowning with no one to save them.

Yes, many first-year teachers are underqualified and have a hard time. Maybe they don't do the best job that first year.

But I have seen just as many tenured, allegedly qualified teachers, who remain in their jobs simply because they are tenured.

I applaud the Board of School Commissioners for wanting to weed out poor quality teachers, but I make this suggestion: Get rid of some of the teachers who have been in the system forever and refuse to change and try new things. Keep those young, eager men and women who want to help change a system that needs all the help it can get.

But give them the support they need so that they can become excellent teachers. Don't leave them to figure it out on their own and then ditch them when they have a hard time.

THE BALTIMORE SUN July 3, 1999, Saturday

Jennifer Hamilton, Baltimore

Having just completed my third year as a middle school science teacher for the Baltimore city schools, I wanted to respond to The Sun's article on the firing of 278 city teachers.

Baltimore desperately needs new teachers. I am ashamed to read that we have fired several without first supporting their efforts to learn their craft.

When I read about Andre Turner, a teacher who wasn't renewed after one year who had "no supplemental lesson or any assistance," or Cynthia Duncan, a special education teacher (there is a severe shortage of special ed teachers) who said, "There was no help at all," I just want to cry.

It is common knowledge that the first year of any teacher's career is a struggle to reconcile theories of classroom management with the realities of students' daily lives. New teachers can be expected to receive less than satisfactory ratings for classroom management.

They need and expect the support of their principals, the specialists from their department and other faculty members. If this support is not provided, it is those who failed to provide it who should be retrained or replaced.

I did receive the support I needed to flourish as a science teacher in Baltimore.

My principal encouraged my efforts and provided timely evaluations; a specialist came to my school and taught me a method of classroom management that worked; and the city offered workshops for science teachers and provided materials and models for the hands-on activities I use in class. My co-workers checked on me constantly, offering advice and encouragement.

The Baltimore City school system needs to provide this kind of support on a systemwide basis. Many excellent models of mentor programs are in use in urban systems across the nation.

The Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program in Columbus, Ohio is an example.

PAR is a systemwide program that uses superb teachers for three-year stints as mentors. The principal, the teacher and an objective review board work to improve the performance of new or underperforming teachers.

The goal of the program is to foster excellent teaching. Mentors return to the classroom after three years to avoid getting out of touch with classroom life.

Jodie Kavanaugh, Baltimore

The writer teaches at Hamilton Middle School.

Let's not throw out history in the name of urban progress

The Sun's editorial "Gems at risk?" (June 17) misconstrued the debate over revitalizing downtown Baltimore's west side and that area's recent inclusion on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of Americas 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.

The editorial said the West Side plan "isn't a case of an ill- conceived demolition plan. It is a thoughtful and carefully considered effort to breathe new life into a distressed downtown area with a mix of old and new. "

If that were the case, we would be the plan's biggest supporters. Unfortunately, it's not.

In June 1998, the West Side Master Plan was released. The plan was funded by the Weinberg Foundation and

guided by the West Side Task Force, a small group including representatives of the Weinberg Foundation, the University of Maryland at Baltimore, and the University of Maryland Medical Systems.

The public had no opportunity for involvement or comment before the plan was released and subsequently endorsed by Mayor Schموke and the Baltimore Development Corp.

The plan calls for acquisition and demolition of roughly 100 buildings, 75 of which contribute to the Market Center Historic District -- an area eligible for the National Register for Historic Places because of its historic and architectural significance.

In December 1998, a City Council bill amended the urban renewal plan for the area to give the city authority to condemn and acquire the properties identified in the new master plan. Mayor Schموke signed this bill May 10.

Under this legislation, and a condemnation bill passed in June 1998 for properties along Howard Street north of the west-side project area, 150 historic buildings are threatened with condemnation and demolition. More than 100 small businesses could be forced to relocate.

In response, Preservation Maryland and Baltimore Heritage Inc. developed an alternative renewal approach based on what has worked in other cities. It's called, "Downtown: a Preservation Based Strategy for the Revitalization of the West Side."

In this plan, we are not advocating, as The Sun editorial suggested, that the city would be "better off if the rundown area were left alone."

Instead, we illustrate how historic preservation can be a powerful tool for revitalization and outline the impressive package of local, state, and federal tax incentives available to rehabilitate historic properties.

We enthusiastically support the wonderful catalyst projects on the west side that were on the drawing boards or under way before the condemnation bill passed. These historic preservation projects include renovating the Hippodrome Theater for a performing arts complex; converting the Hecht Co., Abell and Congress Hotel buildings to apartments; and rehabilitating the Stewart's building for a telemarketing center.

To take advantage of tax incentives for rehabilitation, each building will be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

We are not proposing that every historic building be saved. However, many opportunities exist for compatible infill development, including numerous surface parking lots. These should be exploited before we sacrifice irreplaceable historic buildings.

Let's not repeat the mistakes of earlier failed urban renewal efforts pushed through in the name of progress. It would be a terrible mistake for Baltimore to ignore historic preservation success stories of its own, such as Fells Point, Federal Hill and, most recently, Canton.

These communities that have preserved the historic character and unique identity that make them attractive as places to live, work and visit. It's no coincidence that historic districts are at the center of their thriving residential and commercial markets.

The National Trust's listing of Baltimore's west side among its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places should be a wake-up call for Baltimore to capitalize on the wonderful historic buildings on the west side and make that area a preservation and economic development success story too.

William J. Pencek Jr.

Tyler Gearhart, Baltimore

Mr. Pencek is president of Baltimore Heritage Inc. Mr. Gearhart is executive director of Preservation Maryland.

Transit tax credit may change commuting landscape

On July 1, Maryland's commuter choice law took effect, allowing the state's transit riders a tax credit of as much as \$700 a year and Maryland employers an annual tax cut of as much as \$360 for each employee (" Business groups join push for transit tax credit," Feb. 25).

This transit tax incentive is by far the largest of its kind in the country. Maryland's legislators and Gov. Parris N. Glendening should be commended for recognizing commuter choice as an idea whose time has come.

For years, the sole commuter benefit most Americans enjoyed was a free parking space at work.

This was an incentive to drive, creating more air pollution and traffic- snarled freeways in Maryland and throughout the country.

Studies have shown that more than nine in 10 commuters drive to work, and more than nine in 10 of the cars driven to work have just one occupant.

But all that is starting to change.

The commuter choice tax credit bill is a voluntary incentive that can bring relief to traffic-strained communities and put money in the hands of Maryland businesses and workers. It provides a 50 percent tax credit for an employer who provides transit benefits of as much as \$30 per employee per month.

Low and moderate income workers can particularly benefit, since commuting costs represent a larger relative burden on them, and they tend to be more reliant on ride sharing and public transit.

Maryland commuter choice adds to incentives the federal government provided in last year's Transportation Equity Act for the 21st century. Under that law, employers can offer tax-free subsidies for their employees' transit costs or employees can use pre-tax earnings to pay for transit. The law also allows employers to offer cash in lieu of parking -- thus "cashing out" old inflexible parking subsidies.

A study of California companies offering this new cash-out option found that one out of eight employees who drove to work chose to leave the car at home and instead take the cash in the form of a pay raise.

Transit incentives like these could change the commuting landscape, allowing more efficient use of roads and transit systems. Commuter choice plans can also expand access to suburban jobs.

But the law will not have any effect unless people know about it and use it.

Municipal and state agencies should promote commuter choice, offer it to their work force and make it part of regional transportation plans and economic development strategies.

Michael Replogle, Washington

The writer is federal transportation director at the Environmental Defense Fund.

Pushing rehab over prison

Study after study has concluded that treatment is the most effective weapon against drug abuse.

THE BALTIMORE SUN July 3, 1999, Saturday

A RAND Corp. study, for example, revealed that treatment of heavy drug users reduces serious crime against people and property 15 times more than tough mandatory sentences.

A 1998 study by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that treatment instead of prison saves about \$20,000 per person per year.

And after three years as the director of national drug policy, Barry R. McCaffrey has concluded that treatment is the best way to reduce drug use.

About 10 years ago, some judges and prosecutors, frustrated with the revolving door justice of sending addicts to prison over and over again, started what we now call drug courts. These courts shift drug policy from punishment to treatment.

Criminal charges against the nonviolent drug offenders are dropped if the offender successfully completes drug treatment. Offenders who fail to live up to their treatment commitment have their charges reinstated, are brought to trial and sentenced as criminals.

In the early 1990s, there were only a handful of drug courts. Now we have 600 nationwide. They have sent more than 90,000 people to drug treatment.

According to the federal General Accounting Office (GAO), 70 percent of those sent to drug courts successfully complete treatment. The GAO also found that drug users sent to prison instead of treatment are four times more likely to commit another drug crime within five years.

Baltimore City's drug court is 5 years old. In 1996, its first evaluation found that 23 percent of the offenders who went through the drug court were arrested for new crimes, as opposed to 28 percent of those on probation.

Hagerstown's drug court has recorded a recidivism rate for inmates who successfully complete its treatment program of just 22 percent.

Given the evidence that treatment is more effective than prison in fighting drug abuse and drug crime and the success rate of drug courts that incorporate that principle, one would think the focus of anti-drug funds would shift to treatment. Unfortunately, the bulk of it still goes to law enforcement and incarceration.

While the Clinton administration has increased treatment funding 17 percent, about 65 percent of the \$18 billion budget to fight drugs goes to enforcement and interdiction. Only \$3 billion is directed to treatment.

Maryland's recent allocation of \$10 million a year for 10 years to substance abuse programs from Maryland's \$4.4 billion tobacco settlement is certainly positive.

I hope some of that money will be used to expand the drug court philosophy of less imprisonment and more treatment.

The aim is not to coddle drug offenders, but to break the drug use and drug crime cycle.

Carolyn Krysiak, Baltimore

The writer represents the 46th Legislative District in Maryland's House of Delegates.

Getting to the heart of addiction problem

The Sun's editorial "Drug addiction fuels murderous trend" (June 27), was very enlightening about Baltimore's addiction treatment plan. Our city must offer drug treatment on demand if we are to stop this drug epidemic. The city

and state must cooperate to find the funds needed.

The Schmoke administration makes the valid point that we should offer treatment to addicts before they wind up in the criminal justice system. Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend's idea of treating lawbreakers in order to secure public safety is also valid.

But, because treatment works best when the patient is ready and willing to be helped. I prefer Mr. Schmoke's plan. A judge can order an addict into treatment, but if the addict thinks he or she has no problem or needs no help, a treatment slot will be wasted.

Joseph R. Armstead Jr., Baltimore

"Drug addiction fuels murderous trend" is a misleading title, which gives the impression that drug addiction itself causes violence. In fact, nearly all drug-related murders can be attributed to the underground economy based around their sale.

The black market for illegal drugs operates in the same manner as any other black market. People cannot buy illegal drugs with checks or credit cards, so large amounts of cash are involved. Drug dealers are prime targets for rip-off artists.

Since legal authorities can't be called in, drug disputes must be settled with violence. This endangers users, dealers and others who just happen to be in the area when shots start going off.

The illegal drug trade requires three things to exist: a supply of drugs, a demand for drugs and laws prohibiting their sale and possession. Removing any one of these would cause the black market to disappear.

Many years of drug prohibition have failed to eliminate them or even reduce demand or supply.

It's long past time for our leaders to quit pretending they can eliminate the drug market and start regulating it.

Patrick Froehlich, Richmond, Va.

The Sun's editorial "Drug addiction fuels murderous trend" discussed the different drug-treatment approaches advocated by Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and Baltimore Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke.

But neither approach would substantially reduce drug-related crime and law enforcement costs because they would be compromised by failed U.S. drug policy.

Paradoxically, the federal drug prohibition has given adults and minors easy access to adulterated but expensive drugs -- promoting addiction, criminality, incarceration and bad health.

The federal government should reduce its presence in drug policy. It repealed alcohol prohibition after its ruinous consequences became apparent. Alcohol-use policy administered by the states has been a marked improvement.

Repealing federal laws prohibiting drugs would allow the states to seek health-based solutions to drug abuse and reduce the costs connected with the punitive approach.

Kevin Fansler, Havre de Grace

As a person who has had a long-term interest in substance abuse issues, I appreciated The Sun's editorials on the city's drug problem.

However, my experience indicates that The Sun's analysis does not go to the heart of the problem.

THE BALTIMORE SUN July 3, 1999, Saturday

Even when adequate drug treatment is available, addicts' recidivism rates often run to 80 percent.

New ways of dealing with substance abuse prevention need to be found.

The existence of the very large substance abuse industry has been a deterrent to the development of such new directions.

My work and other research has shown that the spiritual dimension is crucial in any substance abuse treatment program, yet expensive treatment programs often ignore it.

As we expand the prevention services available, we must examine new ways of treating substance abuse.

Rabbi Martin Siegel, Columbia

The writer is president of the Institute on Behavioral Health and Spirituality.

LOAD-DATE: July 5, 1999