

Advocates for Community and Rural Education

In this issue:

In recognition of February as Black History Month, ACRE celebrates the contributions of outstanding African-American educators, students, and schools who are making a difference in education across Arkansas.

Below: Mr. Jack Crumbly, superintendent at Earle and president of the Arkansas African-American Administrators Association.



African-American women educators leading the way

Raising achievement levels in schools in the Arkansas Delta has long been a challenge due to high poverty rates, higher than average adult illiteracy, inadequate funding, and historic disadvantages.

These days, though, students in the small community and rural schools of south and east Arkansas have a better chance to learn due to the strong leadership of educators who have dedicated themselves to improving instruction and achievement in their schools.

Kathy Cole, Carthage

Kathy Cole, before Act 60 superintendent and now K-12 principal at Carthage; Lillie Randall, elementary principal at Hampton; and Sylvia Moore, superintendent at Parkin, are three bright, committed African-American women educators whose efforts are leading to higher achievement levels in their schools.

When Kathy Cole became K-12 principal at Carthage four years ago, the isolated 104 pupil district was on school improvement. The school hadn't spent any money on materials, programs, or training for several years.

Because of its location—over 25 miles from any other school in a purely rural area with no commercial property—and low teacher salaries, it had to rely on a mostly inexperienced staff due to high teacher turnover. The poverty rate is 74% in the 89% minority dis-

trict.

Says Cole, "I felt our students had intelligence, could have flourished, but we didn't have school stability and teachers didn't have the support they should have."

Upon assuming the principalship at Carthage, Cole instituted standards-based learning. To improve literacy, she started Arkansas Reading First, Accelerated Reader, Step up to Writing, ELLA, and Effective Literacy. Literacy labs were installed in the fifth and sixth grade classrooms.

An Everyday Math program was instituted to improve mathematics instruction, and the high school participated in High Schools That Work. This year Cole also applied for and got a grant to start a preschool

All these efforts are paying off for Carthage, with achievement levels improving year after year so that this year the school met standards.

One problem Carthage doesn't face is lack of parental involvement. According to Cole, they have 80 to 100 per cent participation in any activity at the school involving parents.

Any contact that doesn't happen in the routine course of the day may be made at their parent exercise program. Twice a week up to 25 men and women over 30 meet with Cole at the school to work out and often end up sharing concerns about the school and their children.



Kathy Cole

Kathy Cole earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education in 1994 from Henderson State University. She received her master's degree in public school administration in 1999. She has seven different certifications, including social studies, special education, elementary education, secondary education, curriculum coordinator, and principal for grades K-12.

None of this came easy for Cole, who is truly a self-made woman. While living alone and putting herself through high school, she was captain of the cheerleader squad, the first African-American homecoming queen at Clarendon, class president in the 12th grade, Girls State delegate, 1st runner-up in the Miss Stuttgart beauty pageant, and talent winner in the

African-American women educators leading the way (cont.)

Arkansas Jr. Miss contest. After high school, she attended UCA with a National Cheerleader Scholarship and was a cheerleader for the UCA Bears.

She dropped out of college after two years to work and raise her two sons, now college students aged 21 and 23, and then went back to earn her degrees and begin her professional career.

With consolidation of Carthage into the Malvern School District by Act 60 in 2004, Cole doesn't know what the ultimate fate of her school will be. In the meantime, she's planning to begin working on her PhD in administration this spring and feels she still has much to contribute to the education of children in Arkansas.

Lillie Randall, Hampton

In her thirty-first year in education, Lillie Randall is the first African-American to hold the position of principal in the majority white Hampton School District.

Randall is a "home-town girl" who grew up in Hampton and got her bachelor's degree from what is now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

Over the next several years, she taught at Strong and Hampton and did graduate work at SAU in Magnolia and Henderson State in Arkadelphia.

She holds elementary education, elementary counseling, and elementary principal's certificates and has worked as a first grade teacher, federal programs coordinator, staff coordinator, testing coordinator, assistant principal, and for the last four years principal of the 390 student elementary school.

Soon after becoming principal, Randall became concerned about her school's test scores. To try to improve them, she started a reading skills improvement program with ELLA; Effective Literacy; Sing, Spell, Read, and Write; Step Up to Writing; and Reading Recovery.

Randal then had her teachers create and administer a mock Benchmark test once a month with everything set up just like the real test in order to make her students familiar with the format they would be facing on

state exams.

After seeing measurable improvement in achievement in literacy, Randall is now looking into math programs to try to duplicate the success she and her teachers and students have had with literacy.



Lillie Randall

Lillie Randall says, "I believe God placed me in this office behind this desk for a purpose. This is my calling. I'm on a mission."

Randall believes her mission is bringing people together. She takes a special interest in parent involvement and works really hard at bringing parents and teachers together. She encourages teachers to see parents as partners and to keep them informed by publishing weekly and monthly newsletters. Her school also has a parent center, a parent coordinator, and a parent volunteer program. Two of the most special events of the year at Hampton Elementary School are the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners that parents and grandparents share with the children.

Randall has a heart for children as well. In the 713 student district which is 71% white, 26% African-American, and 3% Hispanic and which has a 60% poverty rate, she says she wants to make sure all children are treated fairly and equally. Sometimes a child gets "a bad shake," she says. "I can't write him off. We're going to do whatever we have to do to save that

child."

All of Randall's programs appear to be paying off. On last year's fourth grade Benchmark exams, students scored 73% proficient and advanced in math (with an impressive 56% advanced) and 73% proficient and advanced in literacy.

"I don't want you to think that Hampton Elementary School is so good solely because of me," says the veteran educator. "I am indeed very fortunate and blessed to have some outstanding people who work with me."

Sylvia Moore, Parkin

"Keeping the Faith" is the slogan at the top of Sylvia Riley-Moore's biography. Talking to her, one senses that is just what this bright young female African-American superintendent of one of the smallest remaining majority African-American school districts is trying to do.

Parkin, in Cross County, is right at the 350 number that forces a school district to merge with another under Act 60. With 89 per cent of its students in poverty, the district struggles, understandably so, with achievement.

However, Moore, self-described as a "hands-on" administrator, is applying all her skill and determination to improving the school's lagging test scores.

When Moore became superintendent four years ago, she introduced standards-based learning. With a grant she installed the Arkansas Reading Excellence program and put a literacy lab in one of the middle school classrooms. Her teachers have received ELLA and McRAT program training for reading and writing.

Moore says she is "trying to build a very strong math program, with Everyday Math in grades K-5 and the Connected Mathematics Project in grades 6-8.

"High priority" funding from Act 101 has helped her recruit qualified teachers, allowing her to hire a K-6 literacy coach, a middle-level literacy coach, and a K-12 math coach.

Save Our Schools

African-American women educators leading the way (cont.)

Money gained from the new funding formula passed by the Legislature in 2004 also has enabled Moore to raise Parkin's minimum teacher salary from \$25,755 to \$28,000. This has made it easier to recruit and retain qualified teachers.

New NSLA money has helped Moore establish a whole range of after-school programs. Extended day is available to every student from kindergarten through End of Course.

Kindergarten through third grade focuses on math and literacy, while fourth grade through End of Course focuses on mathematics.

There is also a Saturday school for grade four through End of Course that is available to all students.

Besides working on basic skills, Sylvia Moore says one of her goals is to increase the number of students in the high school in AP and other advanced courses.

Right now, the school offers AP American History and an AP science class, and Moore hopes to add AP English next year. Through distance learning from the School of Math and Science in Hot Springs, students take Spanish I and II, chemistry, and physics.

Moore is helped in her efforts by a "wonderful curriculum and federal programs coordinator and excellent principals who work as a team and do what has to be done."

Sylvia Moore grew up in Parkin, graduating from high school there in 1981. She earned her bachelor's degree in education at Le-Moyne-Owen College in Memphis, graduating *magna cum laude*. She received her masters in education administration degree from Trevecca Nazarene College in Nashville, TN, in 1992 while teaching fifth grade in Memphis, TN.

Prior to becoming superintendent at Parkin, Moore was a kindergarten teacher, director of curriculum and federal programs, and assistant superintendent.

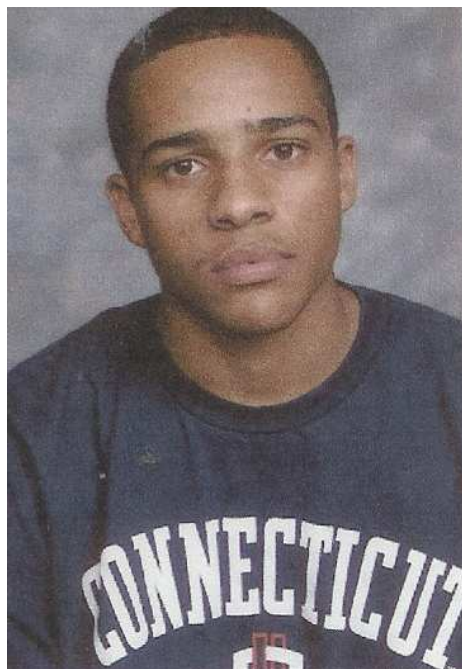
Moore says her greatest challenge in leading her school is raising achievement levels in the short amount of time allowed by the state's strict accountability laws.

"How do you expect me to turn it around in two years when it's taken me two years to get my teachers trained?" she asks. "That's the cannon I'm trying to dodge."

Moore describes herself as the "devoted mother" of two children, a daughter who attends East Arkansas Community College and a son who is in the second grade at Parkin Elementary School. Of her son, she says, "I wouldn't have him anywhere else. He's getting an excellent education."

Sustained by her strong faith, she adds that most of all she is "dedicated to the glorification and edification of the one who has made all these blessings occur in her life, Jesus Christ."

Marvell Junior has high Expectations— Works for bright future



Danny Thompson

When asked about promising young African-American students in his school, Marvell high school principal Howard Larry points to Danny Thompson.

Thompson, a junior, is already thinking seriously about his future and working toward acceptance by a good college on the way to a successful career.

This past summer, Thompson was accepted in summer school at Yale University in their Junior Statesman program, which teaches youth about American government.

To enter this competitive and prestigious program, Thompson had to submit a personal essay along with recommendations and a transcript.

Thompson, who carries a straight-A average, would like to attend an Ivy League College, the University of Florida, or the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

To prepare himself for challenging college work, he is now taking or has taken AP English, AP Art History, chemistry, Algebra I,

(cont. Thompson page 4)



Superintendent Sylvia Moore at her desk at Parkin.

Save Our Schools

Lavina Grandon
4408 Blankenship Road
Everton, AR 72633

Phone: 870-429-6543
Fax: 870-429-6543
Email: lgrandon@rittemet.com

Advocates for Community and Rural Education



Earle, cont.

40 per cent of Earle graduates at least start college. At Earle High School they are offered the full range of college prep classes, including several Advanced Placement classes that they started offering three or four years ago.

Crumbly says they try to offer at Earle “anything a student could get anywhere else.” They also offer after school and Saturday programs for students who need help with basic skills

Both Crumbly and Jamison have high praise for the Earle community and students.

They point out that over the last few years this community in which 94 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch has approved two millage increases, one to build a new high school and another to house a career and technical education complex as well as other uses.

Because of their geographic isolation, school officials often take Earle students on trips to larger population areas. When they do, they say, “We’re very proud of our students. We’re always getting compliments on their behavior. There’s just some quality in this community that promotes good behavior.”

Let’s honor Arkansas’ African-American educators and students

When Act 60 went into effect last year to consolidate 57 of the state’s smallest school districts, it eliminated thirteen majority African-American districts. At least three more are in danger due to their small size and declining enrollment.

This is one of the most shameful of a number of actions taken by the Arkansas legislature in recent years meant to make educational opportunities more “equal.”

In an article cited in *Rural Leadership in the Deep South, the Double-Edged Legacy of School Desegregation*, a publication by the Rural School and Community Trust, Patricia S. Kusimo noted that the historic 1954 *Brown* decision had a profound impact on rural education for African-Americans. For African-Americans, it often meant attending white public schools at the expense of losing African-American schools, teachers, and administrators.

In Arkansas, demographic changes resulted in a reversal of this trend, in some places over the years creating once again majority African-American districts that reflect populations of the communities they serve.

While we must forever guard against returning to the days of separate and unequal educational opportunities, we must also make greater efforts to ensure that consolidation of schools in Arkansas does not deprive African-American communities of one of their most important institutions, their schools, and deprive African-American students important role models in educators

of their own race and ethnic background.

Especially in poor rural communities—and Arkansas leads the nation in the percentage of its students who attend rural schools and is among the leaders in the percentage of rural children in poverty—we must take care to avoid cheating African-American students of leadership opportunities and opportunities for participation in sports and extracurricular activities they might lose if forced to attend a school far from their homes.

We must take greater care to shine the light of truth on consolidations in which African-American educators have lost positions in cases where a smaller majority African-American district has been swallowed up by a larger majority white district. We must make an effort to see that this doesn’t happen.

As Mr. Jack Crumbly, president of the African-American Administrators Association, says, “It’s very important for African-American students to see that African-Americans can hold positions of authority. [Having African-American teachers and administrators] shows students that African-Americans have ability to perform in skilled jobs. What makes it believable is that we started in the same place.”

There are many heroes of the American Civil Rights movement that we honor in the month of February. In honoring them, let us also not forget to recognize the heroic efforts of African-American educators and students who are fighting *and winning* the struggle to bring about better educational opportunities for students in Arkansas schools.