

THE NORTHWEST CURRENT

Davis Kennedy/Publisher & Editor

Chris Kain/Managing Editor

Signs of progress

The third-year results of the D.C. Comprehensive Assessment System provide evidence that reforms in the D.C. Public Schools are taking hold. Chancellor Michelle Rhee and other officials were quick to note — as they should — that the reading and mathematics proficiency of D.C. students remains shamefully low. Among elementary schools, only 46 percent of students met the standard for proficiency in reading and 40 percent in math. Among secondary schools, just 39 percent met the mark in reading and 36 percent in math.

With such numbers, it is easy to despair. But this year's scores offer reasons for hope. As school officials noted, the systemwide results showed the largest gains in student achievement in nearly a decade. This year, 56 schools made "adequate yearly progress" under the federal No Child Left Behind Act — up from 42 last year, even though the requirement has grown more rigid in accordance with the law's provisions that increase the targets every three years.

Laura McGiffert Slover, a mayoral appointee to the State Board of Education, noted that many school systems see "a third-year bump" after introducing a new exam. But she said the District's scores seem to have outpaced the expected rise.

Also significant is the drop in the number of students testing far below grade level, which was almost certainly the result of the chancellor's emphasis on extra programs for at-risk students. In secondary schools, the percentage of test takers who scored "below basic" in reading dropped from 30 percent in 2006 to 16 percent in 2008; in math, the percentage declined from 41 percent to 26 percent.

Though Chancellor Rhee deserves ample credit, as do the teachers and administrators she helped inspire, so does former Superintendent Clifford Janey. He helped establish the Comprehensive Assessment System, with its direct links to the District's curriculum. He also insisted on high-quality standards modeled on successful accountability measures in Massachusetts.

The school system and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education also merit kudos for releasing the scores in mid-July, a good month earlier than in most recent years. That gives parents time to consider whether to seek new placements for their children.

Taming the Giant

Next week, the Zoning Commission is expected to consider whether to schedule a public hearing on Stop & Shop's application for an expanded Giant supermarket on Wisconsin Avenue at Newark Street as part of an expansive mixed-use project.

The plan for the Giant parcel envisions new retail stores facing Wisconsin Avenue, as well as underground parking and new housing. On the adjacent block, a five-story retail-and-residential building would replace the current structure. At a community meeting last month, the debate over legitimate issues of scale and density quickly devolved.

There is a clear need in the neighborhood for a full-service grocery store that is not confined to a 1950s-style layout and size. We hope that community leaders will not allow nitpicking and unreasonable demands once again to delay the project, which promises to provide a remodeled supermarket at long last — hopefully by 2011.

The Zoning Commission will have to consider whether the proposed project's scale is appropriate for the site, and the neighborhood commission and other community groups have an important role to play in the discussion. Additional discussions among neighborhood leaders and Giant representatives may turn up ways to improve the project, but we believe the current framework is quite reasonable — using mid-rise construction on the northern block to help facilitate the remodeling of an aged grocery store into a modern supermarket. The project promises to provide a vibrant retail center with shops and restaurants catering to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods.

'You're just whistling Dixie ...'

The District's new handgun law — with its tight restrictions and bureaucratic registration hoops — is drawing heat.

"It reminds me of 'massive resistance,'" said Clark Neily, a senior attorney at the Institute for Justice, referring to the Southern states' reaction to the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision. "The rhetoric is very similar: 'We have a certain way of doing things here. We don't care what the courts have to say,'" he told NBC4, mocking the city's response to the Supreme Court's recent gun-ban decision by comparing it to one of Dixie's worst periods.

Neily is one of several lawyers who fought to get the District's total handgun ban declared unconstitutional. For those of you who don't know or don't remember, massive resistance was the notorious effort by Southern states to do everything they could to avoid integration. It was an ugly period in terms of respect for the law.

Should Neily or anyone else go back into court, there will be plenty of ammunition for the lawsuit.

City officials such as Attorney General Peter Nickles have declared publicly that they expect to be sued. In particular, the city is still outlawing most semiautomatic guns and requiring trigger locks. It has a fuzzy exception for "immediate" danger, but that may not be enough to fend off more suits.

During council debate, Ward 3's Mary Cheh urged her colleagues to do the bare minimum to comply with the U.S. Supreme Court when it passed emergency legislation last week.

"I think we need something right now because we have to comply," she said. "But we also need time ... to come up with something that protects the citizens as much as we possibly can and yet goes right up to the fence line that the Supreme Court has erected."

Another loss in court is not the only thing the city should fear.

In this political year, Congress could suddenly have a D.C. gun law before it that's far more permissive than the city's effort. The House and the Senate could wind up trampling on home rule.

■ **Whistling Dixie II.** Are you among those who believe young people curse too much? Do you hate the offensive, vulgar lyrics in many pop songs? You're not alone, at least when it comes to the cursing.

The owner of Emma Mae Gallery at 14th and U streets NW wants to do something about the pervasive foul language used by so many young people.



TOM SHERWOOD'S NOTEBOOK

"The Emma Mae Gallery has organized the 'Respect Yourself, Stop the Profanity' campaign," says owner Sandra Butler-Truesdale, a former school board member. "We have printed posters and fliers to bring attention to those who expose us to this vile language without thought or concern for others. ... We feel that it is time to come forward and say no to this behavior."

Good luck with this campaign. Maybe we could put out "curse jars" and have everyone contribute a dollar for every offense. Might be just as realistic.

■ **Whistling Dixie III.** It was big news last week when Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama announced his campaign will have 20 offices in Virginia.

Virginia hasn't voted for a Democrat for president since Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

Some hopeful state Democrats are saying they feel they can win this year. They point to the recent Democratic wins for governor and Jim Webb's defeat of Republican Sen. George Allen.

But those are all statewide contests focused on statewide issues. It's widely agreed that Allen would almost surely have won except for that infamous "macaca" incident. (That'll be \$1 for the cuss jar, George.)

Vote-rich Northern Virginia may be trending Democratic, but it's a stretch to say ol' Virginia will be in the Democratic column this fall.

Writing this past weekend in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, columnist Dick Polman noted that every four years the Democrats "get in touch with their inner NASCAR" and say "this time" they're going to win Southern states. They rarely do.

■ **Whistling Dixie IV.** Does the Obama campaign love little ol' D.C. and its three electoral votes? If there's any guarantee in politics, he'll pick up those three.

Obama didn't defend the city's tough handgun ban, but at least you can now get a D.C. T-shirt from the Obama campaign.

That wasn't the case early last week, when local activist Frank Zampatori went onto the Obama Web site and scrolled through the whole host of site-specific T-shirts. But no D.C.

Zampatori reported a campaign operative told him he should keep checking back to see when D.C. and other places are added. And, as of Monday, the campaign has indeed begun offering "District of Columbia for Obama" shirts.

Tom Sherwood, a Southwest resident, is a political reporter for News 4.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

D.C. Council wrong on gun-right issues

D.C. politicians seem to be unanimous in their disapproval of the Supreme Court's decision regarding the Second Amendment (as if the gun ban had reduced the crime rate), and unanimous in their determination that it should have as little effect on D.C. law as possible ["Council response to Supreme Court ruling," July 16]. That is to be expected.

But I was shocked to read the quote from Ward 6 Council member Tommy Wells, who, referring to the Second Amendment, talks about actions "until we get rid of this antiquated piece of the Constitution."

Where to begin? Perhaps to point out the most basic intent of the individual right to keep and bear arms, namely that individuals acting collectively would have the means to defend against a tyrannical government (and its government-run military), should one occur. To those who think the concept of an overly oppressive government is laughable, good for you. Some of us think otherwise.

How the Second Amendment affects crime rates, constantly debated, is irrelevant. The solution to societal problems is through tough laws, consistently enforced, not through usurpation of the rights of all. The Constitution has underpinned the awesome history of our republic. The thought of current politicians creating any "revisions" of the Constitution, a miraculously

brief, flexible and farsighted document, is, for me, the stuff of nightmares.

Anne Allen
Chevy Chase

Word on renewals didn't filter down

Your July 16 article "District relaxes rules on visitor renewals" is mistitled, since you explain that the "rule" limiting permits does not exist.

It is interesting that this clarification, put out last December, was unknown at the 2nd District police station from January to mid-March, when I needed multiple visitor permits for several different cars. I hope all officers and civilian staff have now been informed.

Janet Tersoff
Foxhall