



**REV. ANTHONY MOTLEY** President of the JOBS Coalition

## JOBS COALITION OUTLOOK FOR 2009

### THE FRUITS OF OUR THOUGHTS AND LABOR

By Rev. Anthony Motley

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## MAKING STRIDES: JOBS COALITION ACCOMPLISHMENTS



While raising awareness of workforce challenges and potential barriers to employment, the JOBS Coalition and its members have combined their resources and industry expertise to achieve the following results:

- Built the Bellevue Resource Center, a program facility serving the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and returning ex-offender populations. The Center was completed on September 30, 2003.
- Guided the creation of the Construction & Design Academy at Cardozo, providing District students access, training, and preparation for careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation. The Academy officially opened in September 2005.
- Leading the construction and renovation of The Gatepost Center, which will include creating a space for a cyber café to provide hands-on food service and restaurant training for youth in Southeast Washington, D.C. The project broke ground in June 2006. □



**STANDING TALL** Shelly Morrison

## NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND: HARM TO CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION? *Part 1 of Two Part Series*

At first blush, the intent of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law is laudable: to raise student achievement in the core academics of math and reading while reducing achievement gaps through goal-directed annual testing. But take a closer look, and some observers say the law's "one size fits all" paradigm is hurting some District schools with Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. *By Arnesa A. Howell*

**N**o Child Left Behind requires schools that have failed to meet certain testing targets to restructure their instructional regimes," says Rod Woodson, legal adviser to the JOBS Coalition, which has supported the return of vocational education to District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). "CTE is viewed as an elective program and not part of core academics. Therefore, due to restructuring under No Child Left Behind, the number of electives is diminished, and as a result, CTE programs are threatened considerably."

There are currently 38 CTE programs in District public high schools, according to DCPS' Office of Career Pathways, a number that has been "pruned" to help cultivate the "best of the best" of these specialized programs.

While some schools like McKinley Technology have consistently made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) under NCLB, others like

Cardozo, Ballou, Dunbar and Woodson Senior High Schools, all which house CTE programs (spanning areas from construction and technology to engineering and business), have been hit hard by restructuring for having overwhelmingly failed to meet the annual benchmarks for math and reading set by the state.

In fact, the Ballou technology program is now defunct with most of its classes cancelled. And the director of the Dunbar pre-engineering program declined to discuss the state of the school's CTE program in the wake of restructuring, deferring instead to the school principal who failed to respond to repeated calls from *JOBS Coalition Pathways*. While those close to these two programs balked at the suggestion that restructuring is to blame, others watching this issue say schools like Dunbar are not immune to restructuring woes, and the "hush-hush"

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Last year, the JOBS Coalition achieved much of what we set out to do. First, our collaboration with other groups allowed us to forge ahead on projects aimed at increasing employment opportunities for the hard-to-reach, hard-to-employ, and the returning “citizen.” Also, we were able to participate in the “Green Jobs Now” initiative, which involved green job training with service provider organizations from all over the United States. We participated in a joint project with the Washington East Community Land Trust to draft a concept paper for the development of an “Alternative Energy, Research and Technology Community” in Ward 8. This initiative aims to create a model community development project using alternative energy sources to power and sustain this community, which will consist of homes, commercial and retail activity, as well as entertainment, cultural arts and research programs. The project is presently under review by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton and Ward 8 Councilmember Marion Barry. I would like to thank our Board of Directors, our partners the Green Earth Coalition, Inner Thoughts Inc., CSOSA (Court Services & Offender Supervision Agency), the Washington East Community Land Trust, and especially Miller & Long Concrete Construction Co., for making 2008 a successful year for the Coalition.

In 2009, in cooperation with the D.C. Housing and Community Development Agency, we hope to break ground in Northwest, Washington, D.C. for what will be the first of many homes sponsored by the D.C. Students Construction Trades Foundation. It is the intention of the Foundation to bring these homes to completion as part of the training students are receiving at the Academy for Construction and Design at Cardozo Senior High School.

Moreover, it is our intention to further the development of the Alternative Energy, Research and Technology Community. Working with Congresswoman Norton, Mayor Adrian Fenty, Councilmember Barry and others, we will make this project a reality. We have also joined forces with the Green Earth Coalition, an urban environment advocacy organization, and others, to bring attention to the plight of our urban parklands and the creation of green jobs. It is our hope that through this effort, we will be in the forefront of making the green jobs movement work at the local/inner-city community level.

With the election of President Barack Obama, who sees the need to retool America and to rehabilitate the infrastructure of our nation, we hope to see the fruits of our thoughts and labor in the years to come. □



**MORRISON**, surrounded by her students and an instructor, says enrollment in the Academy of Construction and Design has suffered under No Child Left Behind.

#### **No Child** *Continued from page 1*

attitude could be the result of outside pressures.

#### **What is No Child Left Behind?**

Increased accountability for schools is a fundamental pillar of NCLB, a federal law signed into law by former President George W. Bush in 2002 that impacts education from the elementary to high school level. It was with NCLB in mind that the Chancellor of D.C. Public Schools, Michelle Rhee, unveiled a restructuring plan for the city's schools requiring, in part, that they meet AYP goals “so it's clear that students are learning,” according to the summary of the District's restructuring plans for the 2008-2009 school year.

A school must fail to reach these annual benchmarks for five years to reach “restructuring” status.

#### **‘Left in the Dark’**

According to data from the Department of Education, less than 25 percent of the District's schools are making Adequate Yearly Progress, leaving a lot of room for improvement. Cardozo is on the laundry list of the city's schools that have fallen short in meeting AYP goals for math and reading for the past five years, making it a prime target for restructuring. But at what cost?

Some observers argue that the D.C. public school system is “running in direct conflict with recognized policy consensus” that CTE programs are a critical part of public education in this city. The latter seems to be a viewpoint held by D.C.



**BRIGHT FUTURES** Academy students are learning math and reading in a “different context.”

Council members like David Catania, who has called for the revitalization of vocational education programs in District schools. Similarly, Mayor Adrian Fenty has called for replication across the city of programs like the Academy of Construction and Design at Cardozo, which provides young people with access to, and training and preparation for, careers in the construction industry and trades after graduation.

Shelly Morrison, manager of the Academy of Construction and Design (ACAD) at Cardozo Senior High School, says school restructuring has taken a toll on the program she oversees—by stagnating enrollment.

By the close of the last school year, enrollment stood at 60 students, according to Morrison, who sought to bump up ACAD attendance this year to at least 150 by energizing young people to enroll in the Academy as freshmen so they could be introduced to the trades that make up the program. By sophomore year, students could then transition into their discipline of choice.

“All that went south,” she says with a half-hearted chuckle. “The restructuring kind of blew a hole into everything.”

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# HELP ON THE WAY FOR 'RETURNING CITIZENS'

In its second meeting of the task force of local government agencies, community-based organizations, and concerned citizens, the JOBS Coalition continued to tackle the issue of “returning citizens” and the barriers to finding—and retaining—employment in a struggling economy. But this time, a handful of employers sat at the table as well to offer their insights. *By Arnesa A. Howell*

“Right now, Miller & Long is taking on a lot of returning citizens as they are coming home, [but] opportunities are small,” said Kyle Brown, a human resource specialist with Miller & Long Concrete Construction, at the Jan. 8 meeting held at Holland & Knight LLP. Miller & Long is not alone in relying on a pipeline of financial resources to move forward with its projects. “Over \$70 million in promised jobs can’t be started because of money issues,” admitted Brown. However, he said the company is “still doing its best to find [placement]—a lot of returning citizens are working.”

Roger Taylor, owner of Your Pampered Home, a Washington, D.C.-based maid and laundering service company, brought up one major area of concern for employers: employee behavior.

“As an employer, it’s difficult to deal with certain behaviors regardless of background,” Taylor said. Many attendees agreed that this issue has, and continues to be, a sticking point for many returning ex-offenders as they try to maintain employment. So how can employers be prepared to handle the returning citizens’ state of mind when they come out of prison?

Some in attendance suggested employer training should go hand-in-hand with the life skills and work training that this segment of the population needs.

“We must attack the cultural and language barriers—cultural competency for the employer and employee,” stressed Rev. Anthony Motley, president of the JOBS Coalition. “A lot can be dealt with if there’s cultural competency on both sides.”

That means gaining a better understanding of communication differences between the work environment and that which a returning ex-offender may have come to know in prison or on the streets. For example, an employer telling a returning citizen that a conversation will be dealt with later can be conveying a different meaning altogether than what is intended.

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There are currently 72 enrollees, far below the 117 anticipated for the 2008-2009 academic school year, but above the 41 ACAD students enrolled in the program in August 2008. Morrison explains that plans to significantly increase enrollment stalled as soon as the school year started with the latest restructuring efforts, which included expanding English and math classes from a semester to a full year.

“The ninth and 10th graders have no place for what they consider an elective,” she says. The more structured curriculum is filled with core academics, leaving “CTE programs in limbo for ninth and 10th graders.” Although now working with school principal Gwendolyn Grant to address this issue, Morrison feels that she was “left in the dark” by DCPS.

She says she willingly handed over her student roster to DCPS, but wasn’t advised in advance about next steps. The situation, Morrison adds, could have been handled better—without hampering a program where students are “getting

core academics of math and reading, but in a different context.”

“I don’t think the people who made the decision took CTE into consideration at all,” asserts Morrison.

It seems that the TransTech Academy at Cardozo is also feeling the pinch, but in a different way. Shirley McCall, coordinator for the TransTech Academy at Cardozo, says scheduling 10th graders for the newly launched pre-engineering program has been a struggle in light of restructuring.

“To get my students in by the fall semester, I had to work harder in the summer to make sure that the room was allotted in their schedules for [TransTech] classes because of prescribed classes,” says McCall.

Clearly, the city’s public schools are facing a changing academic landscape that is altering how—and what—students learn. It’s a trend not expected to ebb in the months to come.

*In the March/April issue of JOBS Coalition Pathways, DCPS addresses restructuring concerns and the future of CTE programs in the city’s public schools. □*

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The *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is the exclusive property of the JOBS Coalition, 4409 South Capital Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20032; (202) 373-1817. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is dedicated to disseminating information that will help strengthen the city’s apprenticeship training and job placement programs, broadening the scope to reach the young, the underserved, the unemployed and the returning ex-offender. *JOBS Coalition Pathways* is published by the Jobs Coalition.

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So with these types of issues on the table, what would encourage employers to hire this population? Taylor suggested branding a program where employers can pull from a group of employees and know they would be reputable candidates.

But Carol Randolph, adviser to the JOBS Coalition, said steps must be taken to go beyond simply certifying someone for employment. "Certificates don't mean much to employers, but if this group got behind something like that, it [would take certification to] a whole new level," she explained.

"We need incentives, and we need to put on our creative hats," said Randolph. Many in attendance echoed this point, saying that tax credits and incentives would be effective ways to

motivate employers.

Randolph stressed that this group has a "strong voice" on the issue of employability for returning ex-offenders. And the second in the expected series of meetings on this matter went beyond simply talk. The task force set up three committees dedicated to helping resolve the issue of overcoming employment barriers returning citizens face as they transition from prison back into their communities.

Those committees are: the branding committee, led by Carol Randolph; the legislative committee, chaired by Cedric Hendricks with the Court Services & Offender Supervision Agency; and the prevention committee, headed by Rodney C. Mitchell, with Reentry Legal Services PLLC. □

## JOBS COALITION PROMISES

- Provide opportunities for District residents to secure gainful employment opportunity.
- Remove barriers that prevent meaningful employment.
- Provide educational and training opportunities for all District residents interested in pursuing careers in various industries and trades.
- Work toward the creation of a comprehensive, fair, and more open system of training and hiring the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.
- Ensure that the training and educational skills being taught are relevant to the job market of today and tomorrow.
- Engage elected and appointed officials to support legislation and maintain appropriate oversight to ensure gainful employment for District residents, including the underserved, unemployed, and returning ex-offenders.

## JOBS COALITION MISSION STATEMENT

**W**e will work together to develop a long-term strategy that creates an environment where aspiring District residents will have unprecedented opportunity to succeed. We strive to create a fair and open system, supported by government, industry, employers and the education and faith-based communities, which seeks to properly train today's apprentices while making an unparalleled commitment to educating students and others not yet in the workforce.

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