Dr. Rice Won't Settle for Sufficiency

New Superintendent Intends to Increase College Readiness in KPS

ANDREA ROOK/ ACCOLADE

Dr. Rice speaks about the principle of character at the Loy Norrix National Honors Society Induction Ceremony on December 5, 2007

Christina Pillsbury
Opinion Editor

Coming to Kalamazoo Public Schools from Clifton New Jersey, Dr. Michael F. Rice was attracted to the diversity of the area. Coupled with the "giving spirit" of the community, Dr. Rice accepted the job in the Kalamazoo area, an area he credits for having a desire to be a part of something better, to build something better for its children.

"I step into a position where there are increased expectations because there are increased expectations for the children [due to the Kalamazoo Promise]," said Rice.

The Kalamazoo Promise, he believes, is the most obvious, but not the only example of the giving spirit of the community. Rice does, however, understand that the community does not come without its challenges.

"I am attracted to the confluence of challenge and the ability to address challenge [in Kalamazoo]," said Rice.

In accepting the position of Superintendent, Rice became the first to come into the district with the Promise already in place. The issue of ensuring that students are ready for college is of utmost importance to Rice. Simply because a student sits through all of his or her classes and graduates does not ensure their college readiness, according to Rice. Simply filling the seat is not adequate.

"Children need to work to be ready for college... It is Important to stay in school, it's necessary [to stay in school], but not sufficient... It's not just about academic, but social and cognitive readiness," said Rice.

Rice feels that KPS graduates should be college ready, whether they plan to attend a college or university, go immediately into the workforce, into the armed services, or into another career path. Students should have the maximum amount of choices after high school. Additionally, Rice would like to alter the message to students about staying in school.

"It ought not to be that we say 'stay in school' and you'll get the Promise, but to learn the maximum amount of information, gather the maximum amount of knowledge, and you'll be ready for college," said Rice.

This issue of college readiness, according to Rice, is an issue that should be addressed at the earliest age possible, beginning with reading to the child at home. If Rice could direct federal education funds, there would be a lot more money spent towards early education and early literacy programs.

"Development of children ready for college does not begin in high school, it arguably, begins at birth," said Rice.

In New Jersey, Rice led the administration that developed a full-day kindergarten program for all schools in the district, which took three years to implement fully. Kalamazoo Public Schools can look forward to this type of commitment to projects and developments that Rice will institute while in Kalamazoo.

One such project Rice hopes to implement is increased literacy for younger students is parent education. Rice believes that encouraging parents to read to their children is of great value because children whose parents read to them develop greater vocabularies, a greater affinity for learning, and greater self esteem. Increasing parent education programs, especially for young parents is a significant responsibility that Rice wishes the district to take on, and for the community to take part in.

"We will not necessarily be responsible for parent education, but we will energize community organizations and church organizations that will," said Rice.

Rice who has publicly opposed the principles and requirements of No Child Left Behind, also has expectations for other levels than early education for this school year. Rice looks to build a framework of expectations for children at every level, socially, cognitively, and academically and to ensure that these different levels of expectations work cohesively. Higher standards in math education and improved writing and language arts curricula can be expected from Rice's strategic planning and curriculum reform committees. Unlike the NCLB standards, Rice understands that children may not be at the nationally set 'Adequate Yearly Progress' benchmarks, but that doesn't mean they're not learning.

"NCLB distills the world into either you made it, or you didn't... There's something wrong with an accountability structure that doesn't give credit for the growth factor," said Rice.

Rice hopes to give credit to students who are improving, whether or not that means they are meeting AYP benchmarks. He cites the example of a child entering a 7th grade language arts class at a 2nd grade reading level. The child works tremendously hard with the teacher, and by the end of the year is promoted a 5th grade level. The child and teacher have made immense progress, yet still do not meet AYP, and therefore the child's progress is ignored by national standards.

Optimistically, Rice takes on the challenge of leading KPS. He looks forward to being a part of the administration that brought KPS the Promise. He looks forward to improving and growing as a community and he hopes to aid in the establishment of a generation of KPS graduates who are college ready.

Rice stressed, "I am confident that we can improve and build upon what we've got going on in KPS."

QUICK FACTS ABOUT DR. RICE

- VERY NEARLY MAJORED IN FRENCH LITERATURE. & TAUGHT FRENCH FOR MANY YEARS
- HAS READ EVERYTHING BY KURT VONNEGUT, J.D. SALINGER, ALICE WALKER AND TONI MORRISON.
- RECEIVED A BACHELORS IN PSYCHOLOGY FROM YALE UNIVERSITY AND A MASTERS AND A DOCTORATE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FROM NEW YORK UNIVERSITY.
- OFFICIALLY BECAME SUPERINTENDANT OF KPS ON SEPTEMBER 20TH 2007

LN Moms Work Hard

TEEN MOMS
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KRISTEN WEHLING/ KNIGHT LIFE

Yatesha Robinson (right), Family Support Coordinator from the Boys' and Girls' Club provides teen mother support for Carise Johnson (left) and the CEYF class.

Carise Johnson, a junior at Loy Norrix who is due to give birth to a baby boy on February 27, has similar ambitions to Beth. Carise, though not quite sure of what career she wants to pursue, is thinking of attending Western Michigan University to become a Registered Nurse and is determined to graduate from high school. However, Carise is finding it difficult to actively participate in high school.

"It's a hassle trying to get up and go to school and keeping up with work…you have to stay home and make sure you're healthy and the baby is healthy," said Carise who struggles between appointments with her physician and managing homework and is finding it difficult to stay awake in class as a result of her pregnancy.

It is difficult for Carise presently, who is preparing for a child and balancing school work. However, Carise is determined to get the best education possible so that she will be able to support her child in the future, hoping that her baby will grow up to be a respectful and responsible child in society.

"I just don't want my baby to be around bad a influence," Carise said proudly.

Being judged too harshly was a major concern for these girls during their pregnancy, especially for Beth.

"I felt like everybody was staring at me because I was just big," said Beth reflecting back on her pregnancy.

Both Beth and Carise have a large amount of support from family and friends which helps them to continue with their education and care for a young child, or in Carise's case to prepare for caring for a baby.

Though Carise's family is not completely elated with her pregnancy, Carise is still grateful for the support of her mom and her family's willingness to talk.

"Some of my family…are not all about my pregnancy, but they're still here to talk," added Carise.

Beth continues to participate in stage crew for Loy Norrix productions while taking her core classes in school. Carise is enrolled in her core studies as well, in addition to taking on a NovaNet course after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Both girls are busy with school in addition to taking care of or preparing to take care of an infant. Coping with these difficulties can be challenging at any age, but it is especially so for young students. One thing is for certain in these young girls' minds though, education is the most important factor in determining the best life possible for their children.

"School is very important because if you show your child that you can't do it then they'll believe that they can't do it," said Beth.

The goals of both Beth and Carise demonstrate their determination to provide for their children. Although Beth's peers were not fully accepting of her pregnancy at such a young age and some of Carise's family may not fully approve of her pregnancy, they are still receiving support from their friends and family. The support Beth and Carise are receiving is helping them to become the best role model for their children and bestow upon them the best opportunities in their life.

CORRECTIONS:

- **Video Game Photos Misrepresented**
  The cutlines for the video game photos in the Virtual Recognition article were transposed.
- **Volleyball Coach Misnamed**
  The varsity volleyball coach is Russ Frey, not Coach Snow.
- **Students Misrepresented in Knights Speak**
  Al-Kee Marr was incorrectly represented as Amar Worthy.
  Deziree Whitley was incorrectly represented as Lashana Johnson.

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