



Tragic School Stories

New York's schools are the most segregated in the nation, and the state needs remedies right away. That was Chancellor Merryl H. Tisch's message to New York's governor and Legislature. She said that minority children are disproportionately trapped in schools that lack teaching talent, course offerings and resources needed to prepare them for college and success.



Simply calling for more school resources will produce disappointing results. There are several minimum requirements that must be met for any child to do well in school.

Someone must make the youngster do his homework, ensure that he gets eight to nine hours of sleep, feed him breakfast and make sure that he behaves in school and respects the teachers. None of these requirements can be satisfied by larger education budgets. They must be accomplished by families, or all else is for naught.

Linda Ball, a public high-school history and government teacher in Cincinnati, has written an engaging book about her experiences, titled "185 Days: School Stories." Let's look at a few of her days.

On Day 167, Mrs. Ball ordered a student to the in-school discipline room for disruption and being in her class without permission. When the student finally decided to leave the room, he told her, "F— you," and then he swatted her on the head with some papers. In her Day 10 section, there's a brief story about how respect is earned. Wesley, a student with an IQ of 140, did an outstanding job on a paper about the Enlightenment but completed only half his assignment and earned an F. Jake, a student repeating her class, told Wesley, "I have newfound respect for you today." Failure earns respect.

Here's one result of Mrs. Ball's assignment to propose a 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, written by a high-school senior: "I think the 28th Amendment should be about a choice weather (sic) to join school or not. I think it should be a choice not something you have to do. Because school just ain't for someone like me. For example school just ain't for me."

Then there's "Day 44: The Graduate." David, a senior, hasn't learned much since the third grade, but he has been passed along and is about to graduate. Mrs. Ball says that not everyone needs to be able to analyze a literary character's motives or whether the U.S. motives in the Spanish-American War were justified. David should have been spared the torture and given suitable activities. He could surely wash cafeteria tables, run errands and change oil and tires. She asks why educators try to force square pegs into round holes year after year, kid after kid.

The grossly poor education that so many blacks receive exacerbates racial problems. During last year's



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disturbances in Ferguson, Missouri, some people complained that of the city's 53 police officers, only four were black. Such an observation typically leads to suggestions of racial discrimination but never leads to a question about the ability of black high-school graduates to pass a civil service exam. It's natural for a black man with a high-school diploma to see himself as equal to a white man with a high-school diploma. In his eyes, differences in employer treatment are ascribed to racial discrimination. It dawns on few that the average black high-school graduate has the level of academic achievement of a white seventh- or eighth-grader or lower. The black high-school graduates who have unearned diplomas have no knowledge of their being fraudulent. If black politicians and civil rights leaders know it, they refuse to publicly acknowledge it.

The bottom line is that if nothing is done to affect the home life and cultural values that produce the non-learning attitudes and climate that are the subject of Linda Ball's "185 Days: School Stories," there's little that can be done to improve black education. The best that politicians can do is to give parents and children who are serious about education a mechanism to opt out of rotten schools. That option is something the education establishment fights tooth and nail against.

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