

Franklin's criticism insults teachers, administrators

After much research, I saw nothing in the Rev. J.L. Franklin's biographical sketch that indicates he possesses any education-related credentials other than a minor in Christian education from Bishop College in Dallas. It appears he has no experience as a public school classroom teacher, school administrator, or central office administrator. Franklin's theologically-based pedigree and appointments to various committees are admirable. However, in contrast, the central office administrators, principals, and teachers he is criticizing have post-graduate education degrees from accredited universities with years of coursework, training, classroom, and school office experience.

In response to Franklin's letter to the editor published January 17, in the *American Press*, it's necessary to address some of his opinions of our school system. He claims our School Board and superintendent are "living in denial" regarding acknowledgment of our low-performing schools. Our leadership has done everything possible within government mandates and guidelines to

support all of our schools, especially those with lower school performance scores. Millions of dollars have been invested on training, incentives and technology among various programs designed to increase student performance and lower student-teacher ratios.

Franklin "guarantees" results will be different by "taking the principals in our best schools and putting them over our worst schools." As a fellow school administrator to those working in "low-performing schools," I take offense with this statement. The principal at Reynaud Middle and the other 12 schools he refers to are hard-working, dedicated, degreed, certified, professional individuals who spend countless hours ensuring that our children have safe environments conducive to a high-quality education.

Clearly, Franklin has little or no idea what it's like to walk in the shoes of a school administrator. He has not experienced the joys of a student and his/her respective teacher(s) who achieves an academic goal. He has not experienced the frustration of dealing with a parent

who has no regard for his/her child's lack of self-discipline. He has not experienced the sadness of dealing with a student who is being verbally, physically, or sexually abused at home or one who comes to school in the same dirty uniform for days.

Franklin avoided in his lecture on how to "fix schools" attacked by the current desegregation order mandated by the federal government. As a result of the desegregation order, students in Lake Charles' Ward 3 schools may attend a school where they would be in the minority of the school demographics.

Currently, over 1,000 students attend schools out of zone. As a result, many schools with majority black populations have lost students with high academic ability to out-of-zone schools. I doubt any principal could do much better in a school in which most of the highest-achieving students who live within a mile of their in-zone school attend a different public school across town.

Would Franklin favor reversing the desegregation order that is obviously detrimental to the performance of the 13 schools he refers to? Or will

he continue to carelessly throw the race card out for self-promoting purposes?

Regarding the "Race to the Top" grant rejection, I am grateful to both the superintendent and board. Based on history, many federal grants come with unfunded mandates and unrealistic expectations. We have highly successful systems in place already that allow us to track and analyze student performance, attract and retain good teachers, and follow state-developed grade level expectations.

Unlike most industries, our "raw material" is not delivered to us in standardized measures. In the public school system, we receive students with a range of issues including abusive home lives, extreme poverty, physical, mental, and learning disabilities. Anyone with any classroom experience knows that talents and deficiencies of students vary widely among class periods much less year to year. It is unfair to teachers to base their pay using student performance evaluation systems. Our teachers are already

stretched thin. They address learning styles, behavior modifications, various teaching strategies, disaggregating data, etc. Educators spend countless hours outside school hours with extracurricular activities, grading papers, planning for lessons, professional development, etc. There is no more space on the plate already served to educators. How dare Franklin insinuate that we aren't doing the best we can with what we've got.

The education of our youth is much more complex than Franklin's shallow approach of attacking leadership in central and school offices. Most, if not all, of us are working harder and smarter than ever before. I respectfully disagree with Franklin on it being a "sad day for the children of Calcasieu Parish." I believe that with the dedicated professionals we have working with our children, it is a great day for the children of Calcasieu Parish.

KEITH LEGER

Lake Charles