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LIFE ON A SCHOOL BOARD

Students: The missing link

Stephanie Gatewood

In Memphis, some schools not making AYP have been reconstituted, whole school leadership has been replaced, and new leadership strategies have been pushed down from the central office. As a member of the Memphis City School Board, I believe there is a critical missing link in the reform process.

Teach for America, New Leaders for New Schools, The New Teacher Project, Race to the Top, and the national push toward common state standards are all great initiatives. Ultimately, they can be

used by educators in their toolbox of resources.

What is missing? Imagine, if you will, attending an exhibition game between the Miami Heat and the Los Angeles Lakers. As you drive to the sports arena, parking is next to impossible to find. Everyone in the city is attending the game. Finally, three miles from the front door, you find a parking space. As you walk to the arena, you think about how awesome the game will be, especially since you have courtside seats. As you

navigate through the crowd, you realize that the game is sold out. You think, “Thankfully, I got my tickets early.”

The announcer comes on the microphone and pumps up the crowd. He invites the audience to participate in the pre-game show, led by the dancers of both teams.

Finally, the moment that everyone has been waiting for arrives. Fans stand to their feet, screaming, cheering, and pumped up with excitement. But wait. No players from either team appear on the court. The cheering fades as the announcer delivers the daunting news that an error has occurred. Someone forgot to invite the basketball players to their own game.

Use this scenario when you consider the missing players in public education or education reform. We, as leaders and policymakers, invite everyone to the game, but we leave out the most important players: our students. They are the ones who must gain the required knowledge. They must sit down to take the test. They can make our educational reforms really fail or succeed.

So, the next time we wish to reform our students’ education, we should first ask them to be part of the conversation. If we let them help us design their education reforms, we might be pleasantly surprised at the results.

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