

**The
BLACK
C o M M e n t a t o r**

Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
www.blackcommentator.com

September 25, 2008 - Issue 292

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

We Need to Stop the Superintendent Shuffle

By Jamala Rogers

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

[School Teacher](#)

Move your career forward with an accredited
online degree!

[School District](#)

Find Listings For Public Schools - Elementary,
Middle & High School.

Ads by Google

They bounce from city to city looking for their next hustle. The crises in public education have created a diseased gene pool of school superintendents who go from urban district to suburban district. They have the school reform jargon down pat, promising fiscal accountability and higher reading scores. And so I ask you: if they knew how to do that successfully, would they be on the market so often?

The average desk life of a school superintendent is about three years. These once-were or wanna-be school superintendents all know the superintendent shuffle. To the tune of the Cupid Shuffle, let's hit it:

"To the right, to the right, to the right, to the right, to the right

Now kick 'em in the butt, kick 'em in the butt."

In St. Louis where the school district has been hemorrhaging for the last five years, we've seen the superintendent shuffle more often they we'd like. Mayor Frances Slay has been on a mission to bring more white, middle-class residents to the city. One of the barriers is the predominantly black, mostly poor school district. The solution? Destabilize the district and bring on the charter schools.

Like a lion waiting in the cut to pounce on his prey, Slay saw his opportunity when Dr. Cleveland Hammonds retired after seven years of service to the district. Quickly, another respected administrator was named to replace him. As soon as Floyd Cruise (2004) began making decisions as if he had power, he was snatched out and never heard from again. Pamela Randall Hughes was named interim supe for a short time in 2005 but learned she was just a stand-in for who the Mayor and his corporate backers really wanted at the helm.

The community organized a gallant fight-back, picking off a couple of the Mayor's board members and replacing them with consensus board members. Slay and his remaining cronies on the board ratcheted up the stakes and brought in their "cleaner". He was William Roberti, a former Brooks Brothers exec. With no school district experience and no superintendent certification, the state waived all such legal and statutory requirements for these special circumstances. Now with Alvarez & Marsal, the so-called global turn-around company, Roberti was paid \$5 million dollars to take the district down.

You know the drill: Twenty-two schools were closed, mostly in black neighborhoods; services were privatized; teachers were laid off; consultant friends and relatives were hired or given no-bid contracts. Test scores plummeted as did staff morale.

After his year of a job well done, Roberti bounces in Creg Williams from Philly with no superintendent credentials. He had done the superintendent hustle from Chicago to Philly. Rudy Crews bounced in as a high-paid consultant. They were collectively described by one local reporter as "hired guns to blow up the district."

Teachers and other personnel started to leave the district in droves. Parents with the resources to do so pulled their children out of the bleeding district for their own educational safety and sanity. With a fractured school board, a dysfunctional district, a burgeoning deficit and drowning test scores, the St. Louis school district was now ripe for a state take-over.

The Republican governor appointed his business friend to head a committee of three to have full authority over the moribund district. The elected board, now with a majority of members democratically elected to implement the community's agenda, has been relegated to the sidelines. Also on the outs was Dr. Diana Bourisaw, a competent supe hired by the "elected board," who had began making significant changes and had won the support of the teachers union, parents and other community stakeholders. She had regained almost all of the 25 accreditation points lost under the Roberti-Williams regime.

Since getting the boot out of St. Louis, Creg Williams has bounced around several cities. Crews has bounced to several districts. Alvarez & Marsal shuffled to New York City and New Orleans, They shuffled all the way to the bank. Cha-ching, cha-ching.

Rudy Crews went on to Miami and became the highest paid superintendent in the country. Community leaders there even chipped in to buy his house. That little romance soured quickly. Crews abused his powers. He used the proverbial cloak to hide his shenanigans and refused to cooperate with requests for transparency. The computer software firm where his son works got the big hook-up for a multi-million contract. Crews just left with a severance pay of \$368,000.

That's the ugliest part of the shuffle. A year or two into the contract, the school board and community find out these superintendents can't or don't deliver on their briefcase of promises. Financially strapped districts have to buy these hustlers' contracts out and still pay for a new superintendent. It is the worse form of exploitation. It means that district jobs have to be cut or schools closed to make up the difference. These hustlers almost always leave the district in worse shape than when they came.

St. Louis is currently looking at three bouncers for the next superintendent of its troubled district. I don't know if they fit the criteria of being in the diseased pool of superintendents that I spoke of earlier but I certainly see some running sores that don't

look healthy.

Kelvin Adams first came with Creg Williams. That association alone makes him suspect since Williams' signature was bringing his incompetent friends into St. Louis for jobs. A source close to the situation say that district employees who had to work with Adams cringe at the thought of him becoming head honcho. Like Roberti and Williams before him, he has no experiences as a superintendent.

Eric Becoats was the former co-interim superintendent of a district in North Carolina. Does that term mean that he was one of two temps the district wouldn't hire as permanent? Becoats has admitted using bad judgment when he ran his private consulting firm out of one of the schools in another district where he was associate supe. Did I mention he hired his wife for an administrative position in the Guilford County school district?

Donnie Evans is best known for a blunder that left students in 60 buses stranded for hours into the night during a December snowstorm. Evans was supposed to be the one to stop the revolving door of superintendents in Providence, RI. But alas, just like his predecessors, he barely got his three years in. Other criticisms of Evans was the lack of communication with parents and the public. Teachers cited a number of issues such as lack of accountability and a lack of clear direction. One school went without a principle for two months. Evans increased the size of special education classes in a sordid effort to close the budget deficit.

The St. Louis superintendent selection process is starting to look like an impending train crash. It's not too late for the State Appointed Board to put on the brakes, suck in their pride, and ask former superintendent Diana Bourisaw to come back. This district cannot afford another failed experiment leaving more human and financial casualties in its wake. Seven superintendents in seven years for an urban district on the brink of disaster. Our children deserve better - in St. Louis and any other city or town. They really, really do.


[Click here to comment on this article
or see what others are saying in the](#)
The BlackCommentator Readers' Corner Blog


BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Jamala Rogers, is the leader of the [Organization for Black Struggle](#) in St. Louis and the [Black Radical Congress](#) National Organizer. Click [here](#) to contact Ms. Rogers.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

[Click Here](#)

[Home](#)

Click Here To
CONTRIBUTE TO  NOW

Click Here To
CONTACT 

Any BlackCommentator.com article may be re-printed so long as it is re-printed in its entirety and full credit given to the author and www.BlackCommentator.com. If the re-print is on the Internet we additionally request a link back to the original piece on

our Website.

Your comments are always welcome.

eMail re-print notice

If you send us an eMail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002 - 2008
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved