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# THE NORTH LAWNDALE COMMUNITY NEWS

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PROVIDING INFORMATION ON RESOURCES AND EVENTS THAT IMPROVE THE LIFESTYLE OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY

## Bleu Mocha Café

### Seasoned with a touch of Louisiana Style Cooking



Bleu Mocha Cafe located at 1552 S. Keeler with Owners Percy and wife Kanya (both in blue tops) and employee Geraline (in white).



From (l-r) Owners Percy and wife Kanya (both in blue tops) and employee Geraline (in white) inside of restaurant

There is a great new soul food restaurant located in a somewhat obscure location on the Westside of Chicago. Located at 1552 S. Keeler Ave and 16<sup>th</sup> street. Driving down 16<sup>th</sup> you might just pass it up, if not for the large A-frame sign with the name Bleu Mocha Café on it.

The owners are a young couple, husband and wife team, Percy and Kanya Harrison. Anchoring on the cooking skills of his wife Kanya, Percy provides the hustle, muscle, marketing and business

development side of this entrepreneurial team. Percy is a licensed electrician who showed commitment while going through electrician apprenticeship training to gain his license as an electrician.

This couple have an interesting story of how they succeeded to this point. "My wife told me that she was tired of asking me for money and things were lean with construction being up and down. I told her you do know how to cook why don't you make some cakes

and we can go sell them," said Percy. Kanya made about 15 cakes, she baked and he frosted them. Kanya being timid at first sat in the car as Percy started selling by cakes in a beauty salons and barber shops as Kanya stayed in the car. The first day the sold every cake slice in about an hour. They started out with with four duffle bags full of packaged cake slices average about seven slices per cake and totalling about 105 slices. Selling cakes eventually developed into catering

and soon they looked for a store front to expand their operation up out of the home.

Kanya has a history of working with food from Louisiana to Chicago. Learning from her grandmother in Louisiana to culinary school here in Chicago. 'I started at a program called Chicago Culinary Kitchens with the Greater Chicago Food Depository. When I graduated from there I just wanted to expand and I got my baker's

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## SCHOOL REFORM THE CHICAGO WAY: CHANGE FOR THE BETTER, OR MORE CONFUSION?

Valerie F. Leonard

The University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research recently released a study, *When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools*. The results indicated that most students experienced very little benefit from closing traditional public schools and reopening them as charter schools (as prescribed by the Renaissance 2010 policy). The report found that most students who transferred from closing schools were re-enrolled in other poor performing schools. (A number of administrators from schools that received displaced students complained that their schools' performance numbers were being diluted, as they were forced to accept underachieving students from the closed schools.) The study also found that, the disruptions impacted the children's performance on standardized reading tests, causing them to lose about six week of learning. In an effort to reduce disruption caused by school closings, CPS changed strategy in 2006. Rather than close schools and

transfer students, CPS decided to keep the students, and replace staff during the summer months. (Some schools have undergone a similar process at least 3 times with no improvement)

President Obama's plans for educational reform will borrow heavily from the Chicago model. The Obama Administration will encourage states to remove limits on the number of charter schools; double the funding levels for charter schools; help create new high quality charter schools; and close underperforming schools. The Obama Administration will also provide \$5 billion to close and reopen 5,000 schools around the country over the next 5 years.

Along the same vein, Illinois Senator Meeke introduced 2 new pieces of legislation to support education reform. Details of each bill may be found by going to <http://www.ilga.gov> and conducting a search by bill number.

SB2494 creates the Illinois School Choice Program, which provides a voucher system for private schools to be reimbursed for costs associated with educating eligible low income students. The bill describes the

eligibility and reporting requirements for participating schools, the calculations for the vouchers and explains how they may be used by parents. The bill also creates the School Choice Fund as a special fund in the State treasury.

SB2495 amends the Charter Schools Law in the School Code by removing limits to the number of charter schools that operate in the State of Illinois

While I am not against vouchers or charters, I am very much against how these tools could be potentially used to undercut traditional public schools. While I have not studied the impacts of vouchers, as a resident of North Lawndale, I have observed first hand the damage done by the manner in which the Renaissance 2010 policies for school reform have been implemented.

Every school that has been closed and re-opened as a charter has (1) been in an area of a real estate development plan sponsored by people who have significant influence with the Chicago Public Schools and formulation of policy. These actions have undermined the control of local

residents of their schools in favor of corporate boards. Rather than being controlled by local school councils, the schools are controlled by boards that by and large have little, if any, representation from North Lawndale.

Moreover, these policies have effectively used schools as anchors for community development. While this is not a bad thing in and of itself, these policies could effectively be used for gentrification rather than uplifting current community residents, if left unchecked.

Every school that has been closed and re-opened has received millions of dollars (one school got over \$30 million) from Chicago Public Schools or TIF funds, for major renovations right before closing. The millions never benefitted the school under whose capital plan the dollars were drawn, but the charter school that replaced the school. Imagine telling third graders that their school will be closing, but they can't come back after it re-opens, because the school will only go up to second grade. Then imagine sending them to a school where they have to cross a major street, which is actually an interstate highway.

Proponents of Renaissance 2010 like to boast that charter schools are better because they outperform their neighborhood counterparts. If 90% of the neighborhood schools are failing, it should not be too hard to outperform them. However, if you compare the charters to citywide performance, and national standards, they do not do nearly as well as the claims. For example:

North Lawndale has 22 elementary schools. Five of these are charter schools. Four of the five schools were created under Renaissance 2010. The charter school that was created under normal conditions, has consistently performed as well as or better than schools in the City of Chicago in reading and math. Another charter school created under Renaissance 2010 performs as well or better than Chicago public schools in math. Two of the charter elementary schools perform as well or better than North Lawndale schools, but not as well as schools city wide, in reading and math. Two of the charter elementary schools perform worse than the

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Visit us on our website at [www.nlcen.org](http://www.nlcen.org) for more articles, photos, information and more.

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HEALTH & THE ECONOMY

One of the major issues of the recent presidential campaign was health care. Health care costs have become an escalating burden for employers and consumers alike. Research has shown that total health spending is reduced when consumers bear more responsibility for their health and the expenses related to it. One of the best ways to increase life expectancy while reducing disability is to encourage a culture of self-care practices.

Self care is personal health maintenance. It is the care taken by individuals towards their own health and well being. Self care includes the actions individuals take in their role as care givers for their children, their families, and others to stay fit and to maintain good physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Extreme self care means making choices and decisions that honor our soul in everyday living. It means feeding ourselves whole foods, moving our bodies every day, balancing silence with activity, and surrounding ourselves with supportive, like-minded people who are committed to improving or restoring health and uplifting the quality of their lives as well.

More than 75% of people surveyed in the United Kingdom said if they had guidance or support from a professional or peer they would feel far more confident about taking care of their own health. Research shows that supporting self care can improve health outcomes and increase patient satisfaction. Our intention is to support individuals, families, institutions, and communities in their efforts to practice extreme self care. During 2009, the North Lawndale Community News focuses on cost-effective ways you can improve your health by practicing self care.

The Economy has made itself the number one issue with gas prices reaching almost \$5.00 per gallon and having a domino effect on everything else sold, except housing stock which experienced a terrible decline with the high rate of foreclosures. The Chicago metropolitan area reported 5,821 new foreclosure filings in December, a foreclosure rate of one new foreclosure filing for every 499 households — more than twice the national average. That brought the area's fourth quarter foreclosure total to 16,949 and its 2006 foreclosure total to 57,706, according to Realty Trac.

Even transportation on the CTA went on the rise with one day passes increasing by seventy-five cents and monthly passes increased by \$10.00 from \$75.00 to \$85.00. Those are just a few of the increases.

The North Lawndale Community News this year is expanding on last years financial focus to give attention to its broader parent the economy. Saving and making smarter shopping decisions will help stop us losing through wasteful choices. Finding new ways to increase our income is a necessity for many in an area where gentrification is not going to stop.

One of the hardest things to change is behavior. Modifying behavior seems to be easy when it comes to pain. Social pain lack of money has to be extreme for many to change. 2009 should be different for many and of course many will continue toward economic mistakes and financial ruin.

But in today's information society there is no excuse for not making smart choices. Financial literacy alone is not enough. Look what happened to Lehman Brothers and what's happening to many other financial institutions let alone individuals, families, and small businesses.

Solutions come to the internet, books, economic experts, financial counselors and experts, the media and your economical neighbors.

The North Lawndale Community News will tap into resources and share them with you, our reader. So to help you improve your health and your economy keep reading The North Lawndale News. We say yours because some may not modify their behavior, except when the pain comes and still some won't change. Your input is also welcome. If you have some information that is beneficial please submit it. Let's make smarter health and economic moves for life in 2009.

# THE NORTH LAWDALE COMMUNITY NEWS

The North Lawndale Community News is now published weekly by Strategic Human Services. Our purpose is to help inform our community on resources, events, and issues relevant to them and our neighboring communities. Our community includes those who live, work, worship in, and/or care about North Lawndale. Our focus is on positive, productive solutions, that will improve the lifestyle of our community members.

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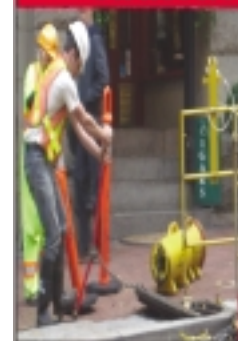
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**Reform** from front page

North Lawndale average, ranking 18 and 21 out of 22 schools in reading, has any regular high schools. (How's that for school choice?) Every one of our high schools is a charter school. The top rated high school is a charter, and IT HAS NEVER, EVER, ACHIEVED AYP in its entire 12 year existence. In spite of this fact, the State Legislature voted overwhelmingly to approve the expansion of the number of charters in the state, and this school was granted permission to take on another site. This school operates in two sites. In both instances, this school "shared" space with an existing public school; CPS poured tens of millions of dollars into the traditional school; closed the traditional school, and the charter school reaped the benefits. It should be noted that one of the schools that closed was performing at a higher level than the charter school that remained open.

The US Secretary of Education has placed this charter high school on the highest negative sanctions for performance. In spite of this, the school is being touted as a national model for educating African American children.

I don't see vouchers or charters as the solution to our schools problems. Like any other tool, they are only as effective as the leadership and strategies that support their use.

**Cafe** from front page



Stop in for delicious Soul Food Dinners and more certification," said Kanya.

"All my recipes are from my paternal and maternal grandmothers," said Kanya. With her grandmother being Creole and from Louisiana, Kanya every Saturday features a Creole dish, "it usually sells out," said Kanya. Jambalaya and Creole Shrimp Scampi are two of the dishes she mentioned. She knows that a lot of people are stand-offish about new things and she tries to introduce the culture a little bit.

Through the week Bleu Mocha Cafe caters to the area with short ribs, baked chicken, meat loaf, pepper steak catfish, kool-aid, lemonade peach cobbler, a macaroni & cheese, dressing mashed potatoes, cabbage, spaghetti, sweet iced tea, and cake slices. The dishes are very affordable at \$7.00 a plate. They also serve combo fast food with fries and & such as hot dogs, polishes, double cheeseburgers, steak fries, beef tacos, grilled chicken, italian beef, chicken tenders, shrimp baskets and more.

Catering is still a strong activity for these entrepreneurs. They are able to expand on the size of catering jobs now with a commercial kitchen to accommodate larger orders.

Bleu Mocha Cafe has created jobs as well. They have currently created four jobs with their restaurant. Gerline Williams is one of those employees. She saw the Harrisons looking at the restaurant which was formerly the location of A & E's Carryout and had been closed for several years. She approached the Harrisons asked them, "Are you going to open this restaurant?", and they said we are thinking about it. I then said if you ever open would you keep me in mind to possibly hire me. I am a very good worker and I stay down the street. When I was interviewed they took a liking to me and they hired me," said Ms. Williams. She has lived on that block for about seven months and grew up right across the street from John Marshal High School, which she also attended.

Percy and Kanya Harrison have three children and hope to outgrow the location they currently occupy. Bleu Mocha Cafe does deliver and you can get a great meal at an affordable price by calling 773 522-2920 or stop by at 1552 S. Keeler. Don't forget Creole Saturdays!

**ON VIDEO**

Compiled and Reviewed by David H. Schultz



**UP**(\*\*\*\*) The latest triumph from Pixar animation is a warm hearted yet adventurous film about relationships lost and found over a dream achieved; that involves a crusty old widower who was a former balloonist living alone in his old house after losing his wife before fulfilling a dream. But with the advent of progress threatening to move him into an old folks' home, Carl sets his old hose in flight with helium filled balloons and discovers an unlikely stowaway, Russell, a junior

wilderness scout in need of achieving his last merit badge that leads them afloat and into an uncharted adventure and a wonderful odd couple that bridges the generation gap in the process. G; 89min. Walt Disney Home Video' Available Nov. 10

**THE UGLY TRUTH** (\*\*\*) Usually buff-up and action ready Gerard Butler displays good comedic chops like a young Mel Gibson in "What Women Want". Butler plays a candid sex talk advice host on a cable access show that gets hired to a rating slumping network newscast. Against the approval of the news' producer (Katherine Heigl) who can't handle any romantic commitment because of her "control freak" nature. Naturally adversarial at first, until they let their guard down when Butler's character receives a network offer that Heigl's boss assigns her to talk him out of. Too much of the proceedings feels like a watered down sitcom variation on "Broadcast News" that is typical not insightful. PG; 95min. Sony Pictures Home Video. Available: Nov. 10

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# Fighting the Flu One Bite at a Time: A Nutritionist's Checklist to Boost Your Child's Immune System to Help Fend off Swine Flu.

If you're like many parents, you are probably bracing yourself for an awful cold and flu season this year. Aside from going to the extreme of putting your child in a plastic bubble before sending him out into the germ world, you can arm him with the strength that he needs to defend himself from those nasty viruses. Author and nutritionist, Christina Schmidt offers up some healthy advice on how you can boost your kid's immune system through the foods that he or she eats.

If you've never been one to obsess over cold and flu season in years past, you may be feeling a bit

more uneasy this year and one word is making all the difference. *Pandemic*. Little needs to be said about it, but with swine flu making its rounds across the globe, you might be on red alert like just about everyone else. You've probably received numerous letters from your child's school, church and daycare reminding you of proper hand washing techniques. Perhaps you've started arming yourself with a bottle of hand sanitizer in your purse and you may even be considering buying a holster for your belt so you can have that bottle of liquid germ killer by your side at all times.

We can't police our kids 24/7 to make sure that they're following proper hand washing protocol, so many parents are left feeling hopeless and may even feel so vulnerable that they see catching swine flu isn't just a possibility; it's inevitable. What's a parent to do when the world outside seems to be a shooting gallery of germs just waiting to land a big nasty virus on someone in your family—short of buying matching hazmat suits?

"The good news is that there's plenty you can do, starting with boosting your child's immune system through her diet," says Christina Schmidt, M.S., Nutritionist and Author of *The Toddler Bistro: Child-Approved Recipes and Expert Nutrition Advice for the Toddler Years* (Bull Publishing Company, 2009, ISBN: 978-1-933503-19-6, \$16.95). "Protecting your child's body from the inside through proper nutrition is not only a great strategy for warding off viruses, it's healthy too! A healthy immune system is a powerful line of defense from those nasty viruses." No amount of liquid hand sanitizer can help your child the second a germ enters her body so keep your kitchen stocked with foods that will help boost her immunity (and yours too!).

There are several nutrients and food components that are vital to

keeping the immune system strong and functioning properly. Many of these nutrients act as vigilante antioxidants that help protect us from "scavengers" that might enter our bodies and increase our risk for various diseases. These nutrients also reduce inflammatory processes, compete with infectious bacteria and they can function to activate our complex immune defense army of white blood cells.

Looking to add to your defense arsenal to protect your child from H1N1 and seasonal flu this year? Read on for Christina's checklist to help you serve up some immune system boosting, cold & flu-buster nutrients and foods. Serve your child foods that are rich in the following nutrients:

- \* **Vitamin C:** citrus fruits, berries, kiwis, peppers, tomatoes
  - \* **Vitamin E:** wheat germ, nuts, fortified cereals, sweet potatoes
  - \* **Beta Carotene (Pro-Vitamin A):** yellow and dark green leafy vegetables, sweet potatoes, orange squash, apricots, cantaloupe
  - \* **Zinc:** meats, fish, poultry, fortified cereals, milk
  - \* **Iron:** meats, poultry, fish, egg yolk, dried fruits, fortified grains, dark molasses
  - \* **Copper:** meats, nuts, chocolate, cherries, whole grains
  - \* **Selenium:** grains, meats, onions, milk
  - \* **Folic Acid:** green leafy vegetables, eggs, meats, fish, beans, broccoli
  - \* **Vitamin B6:** wheat germ, milk, egg yolk, meats
  - \* **Vitamin B12:** milk, eggs, meats
  - \* **Omega 3 Fats:** cold water fish, flax oil, soybeans, walnuts, dark green leafy vegetables
  - \* **Probiotics:** yogurts with the "Live and Active Cultures" seal, fortified foods, supplements
  - \* **Garlic:** as single ingredient or in variety of sauces, soups, ready to eat meals, supplements
- "Some of my favorite cold and flu fighting family-friendly dishes are whole wheat or enriched grain spaghetti with tomato vegetable marinara mixed with chopped chicken or ground turkey; lemony chicken, vegetable and rice soup; sweet potato or butternut squash soup; carrots and ginger sauté; curried lentil stew; chili with stewed tomatoes and ground bison or other meat (optional); whole grain toast with a poached or scrambled egg; yogurt smoothie with fresh or frozen fruit; sliced oranges or grapefruit with seasonal berries," says Schmidt. "We are coming into cranberry season—a berry rich in antioxidants—so be sure to take advantage of fresh cranberry relishes and baked

goods as well." You will find more recipes and menu suggestions in *The Toddler Bistro*.

"As you can see," adds Schmidt, "by eating a healthy, balanced diet with a variety of brightly colored fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, seafood, or lean meats, you can boost your child's immunity. These healthy foods and nutrients can arm you and your family in the fight to help prevent illness (or at least hasten a speedy recovery) from those bugs that circulate in schools and work places on their mission to turn your home life upside down!"

In addition to serving your child immunity-boosting foods, you may also consider supplementing her diet with multivitamins, probiotics, or omega 3 oils. Carlson for Kids makes several high-quality flavored omega 3 oils and chewable vitamins. Jarrow and Nature's Way offer good probiotic powders while Rainbow Light and Centrum for Kids provide great one-a-day chewable multivitamins.

Of course, before giving your child any supplement, be sure to read the dosing instructions and keep them out of your little one's reach! When giving any herbal supplements, check with your child's doctor first and do not mix these with any other medications (unless the doctor says that it will be fine to do so). Also note that some herbal supplements are contraindicated for children or may cause allergic reactions so monitor your child for any reactions. Just do your homework before adding supplements your little one's diet.

While serving your child immunity boosting foods to help him fight the flu, also note that there are some items that should be avoided. Foods that are high in refined sugars and saturated fats can have adverse effects. These foods do a number on the immune system by creating energy peaks and valleys and by fostering inflammation, so be sure to keep foods filled with refined sugars and saturated fats off the menu.

So as the H1N1 cloud looms overhead, remember that you aren't as helpless and vulnerable as you may feel. You actually *do* have great ways to defend your family from the flu and those other sickening viruses out there. Practice the good habit of proper hand washing. Keep those little hands clean and teach your children that those germ fingers need to stay out of their mouths. In addition to germ-avoiding measures, remember that by giving your child the foods and supplements that will strengthen her immunity, you can enjoy this cold and flu season in good health—sniffle and fever free.

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Tali Bakhit

# From Sista To Sister: Is This A Trick or Treat? Charter & Magnet Schools to Replace Chicago Public Schools

Over the last few years we have all seen the results of many children being left behind, displaced and without understanding. As the doors of their neighborhood schools are being shut down and locked only to raise up a Charter School or Magnet School, where standards are much too high for many poverty bound families and children that have been given low quality educations. Is this a trick to push poverty bound and disadvantaged families out of resourceful neighborhoods in the inner city or a treat to open the doors to yuppies and elite families that are willing to pay large sums of money to take over the inner city neighborhoods so that those who can't afford the education and housing will be displaced and without a quality education? As these questions are being raised let's take a look at what is really happening.

Many public schools nation wide are experiencing the results of what many would call an invalid evaluation of the youth which has caused many schools to close. The standardized test which is given to each child and it's results based on the schools average will determine each schools status. The status determined will be whether the school will be closed down and many of it's students be displaced in schools out of their own neighborhoods, or whether the school will remain open, with the same low quality of teachers and staff in many of the inner city schools. Studies show, due to many inner city teachers having the lack of skills to formally teach, many of the youth fall by the wayside and don't have the ability to pass the test based on the quality of standards needed.

According to the Consortium on Chicago Public School Research at the University of Chicago eight out of 10 Chicago Public School students that were displaced out of their neighborhood schools due to closing were transferred to schools that are ranked in the bottom half of system schools based on the standardized tests. As the Public Schools close down, the Charter Schools and Magnet Schools raise up. The same schools that were identified as Public Schools, are being closed for a short amount of time, and opening it's doors back up as Charter or Magnet Schools. Public Schools are open to all of the children in the neighborhood based on location mapping, however Charter and Magnet Schools are only open to the

qualified, discriminating against any child that doesn't fit the criteria. But where do the children who don't fit into the criteria brackets go? Many are being shutout of their own neighbor schools, and in many cases this very situation has lead up to many teens, especially young teen mothers losing their homes with no place to go. This is due to the interruption of the youth who don't fit the criteria being sent into neighborhoods that they are unfamiliar with and are territorial zones occupied by gangs.

For Example: A teenage pregnant mother has a second, 1 year old child to raise. She is set up on a program that will help her stay in her Chicago Housing Authority apartment if she continues to go to school. She doesn't fit the criteria in order to be enrolled in a Charter or Magnet School in her neighborhood. She is afraid to go to the displaced school that she has been assigned to because she doesn't want to cross gang territorial lines, where a classmate of hers was innocently walking down the street and got caught in the cross fire of a gang rival. The young pregnant teen decides not to risk her life and she doesn't go to school and loses her home. Not only is she out of school but now out of a home, what is one to do?

As the city continues to make plans to succeed off of the inner city resourceful location lines, many poor children and families that stand within the poverty brackets are being pushed out, left behind with no place to go. With the many displacements due to the high standards needed to attend a Charter and Magnet School and the 1/2 million dollar condos that are being built in replacement of low income housing which are not affordable to these families, many are being pushed even further into mixed poverty zones and gang violence and the crime rate is rising where innocent children that have nothing to do with gang relations become victims.

How does the city of Chicago plan to solve this problem? Were the plans thought out and evaluated thoroughly? How are those children that are being left behind—the gang members, pregnant teens, teen mothers, abuse victims, suicide victims, troubled youth, etc. how are these children going to receive the education that they need to move above what the statistics have labeled them as? Many

neighborhoods have become death zones for young children, which are almost impossible grids to get out of. With no one who has the proper qualified skills willing to go in to make rescues it makes it even easier for the inner city neighborhoods and resources to be taken over by the rich and wealthy, without a care as to how the uneducated, and poverty bound will be educated to raise up above the statistics. This bamboozle allows for the rich to come in and live comfortable, and the poor to stay poor uneducated and unable to manage with displacement and prone to a lack of a quality education. Unfortunately, the very puzzling part about this situation is that in every occurrence of something of the like happening those who suffer the most are the African American and Latino population.

The West side and South side of Chicago in particular has suffered the most. Children are victims of crimes they had nothing to do with, all as a result of their displacement. In an interview with Mr. Rivera who lives on the South side of Chicago, He explains "My son has just recently transferred into a Charter School that offers him a much better education, where it is required that all students fit the standard of having a 3.2 GPA, but what happens to the young Latino boys that don't have the 3.2 or 3.5 GPA that my son has which qualified him to get into the Charter School." Mr. Rivera's son used to attend Myra Bradwell Public School on the South side of Chicago where last school year half of the students did not pass the 8th grade.

Who's fault is it that the youth have to deal with such extremities? Is it the student, the parent, the teacher, the leadership, the city, the state, who is to blame? Everyone is playing the blame game with no positive results. But why can't each child be rewarded with the same quality of education. Where does the discrimination line begin and end?

According to a concerned parent whom has chosen to remain anonymous "The Never Ending Circle," which he has identified as the lack of quality in reference to education are the results of a lack of foundation and fundamentals that many minority teachers are victims of. Because of the poor quality of education that many minority teachers have received this pattern of poor quality is being extended to the youth in the inner city. With Charter and Magnet School

teachers being graduates of Yale and Harvard University, and many inner city teachers graduating from local community colleges, to compare the level of education could be mentally inundating. Vividly in this scenario again it is revealed that when it comes to education, even on a college level many minority students are left behind and not given the opportunity to enter into the "elite" world of education due to "certain standards." Something is missing. While one should certainly be able to attend a Historical Black College and get the same quality of education that a student from Yale, Harvard, Princeton, etc. is getting. The line has been drawn some where and many minorities nation wide are suffering from this negative domino effect, due to not being able to receive a quality education.

As we continue to take a look up close and personal at the results and feel the pressure of our youth falling by the wayside does society continue to ignore the needs of inner city youth by pushing them all into one big violent section of the city in order to fit the negative statistics that were systematically mapped out for them, or is it the responsibility of the people in the communities to speak up about such a matter that will save the lives of many youth nation wide so that it is mandatory for them to get an equal and quality education? Anyone would agree that the high standards of the Charter and the Magnet Schools are not the problem, as high standards are what the youth need in order to succeed academically and become the future leaders of today and tomorrow.

It's the hoodwinking and manipulation of those who are behind such a modernized form of bondage and oppression to push disadvantaged families and uneducated youth out of their own neighborhoods which takes away the ability to learn those high standards through a quality education. This creates a major problem where many minority children are losing their lives, dignity, self esteem, and ability to move forward due to the displacement and statistical labeling.

For more information about Chicago Public, Magnet & Charter Schools call CPS at 773-553-1000 or log on to <http://www.cps.edu>

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# AT THE FLICKS

David H. Schultz, film critic



Gabourey Sidibe and Mo'Nique in the movie Precious.

**PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL, PUSH BY SAPPHIRE (\*\*\*\*)** "Precious" is an intensely raw, emotional and powerful film that hits close to home and deserves one's full attention. A small yet incredibly daring movie that is sad and shockingly disturbing dealing with uncompromising conditions and taboo behavior that have been unspoken but existed in many single or broken family homes in inner city communities

But more important, beside the harsh reality of this kind of family life; this movie centers around one girl's attempts to better herself that might change her perception and lifestyle.

In her first-ever attempt at acting, Gabourey "Gabby" Sidibe works the hapless juvenile role of Clareece "Precious" Jones from the inside out.

At age 16, the overweight, thick and slow tongue speaking "Precious" had persevered through an already hardened childhood filled with pain, abuse and her illiteracy against the ignorance, brutality and later admitted jealousy of her unsupportive and abusive mother, played by Mo' Nique in an astounding performance that is convincingly scary and brutally cruel.

Every thing Clareece encounters is a slap on her

face to degrade and hold her down and think the worse about herself.

At school, Clareece been discovered to be pregnant with a second child that gets her expelled by the principal whose still encouraged by her efforts in class to recommend an alternative school.

By the way, Clareece's first child born with Down syndrome is kept with grandmother, until needed by Precious' mother to front before the social worker's visits to secure those monthly aide assistant checks.

But overall at home, Precious lives in a ghetto life version of "Cinderella" cooking and waiting on her hands and feet for her short fuse-for-violence, couch potato and resentful mother (Mo'Nique) who sporadically re-enforces negative opinions, down sizes her daughter as being "worthless" and believes only in "welfare over education"

However one out of two things supports Precious' mother's belief and ignorance toward her daughter. Clareece's first child that suffers with Down syndrome is kept with the grandmother, Until needed by Precious' mother to fake a bond with the child, in order to obtain those monthly welfare checks.

And throughout the film, there are sudden bursts

of violence acted upon Precious by her mother that knocks the child out into pleasurable dreams such as living as a glamorous Hollywood star on the red carpet, or vogue-ing for a photo shoot or glam-up doing a music video. Until the child is abruptly relieved back into her reality.

There is also a reoccurring nightmare from Precious' past, when as a child, Precious suffering with Down syndrome was violently raped by her father who felt she tasted sweeter than the mother..

Still, Precious quietly continues to grow in her writing at the alternative school through a concerned ABC teacher. Ms. Rain (Paula Patton).

Later, Precious suffers labor pains in class that leads to being rushed to the hospital given not only birth to a healthy baby boy, but she gets to see the chance for friendship that could blossom to love with nurses' aide, John (Lenny Kravitz)

When Precious returns home with her new baby her mother snaps violently on her and even tossing the baby. Because Precious grew tired of lying and told the aide office the truth that cut off the welfare checks that the mother depended upon.

This leads to a physical battle that ends with Precious leaving with her baby and soon after breaks into the alternative school building for shelter that is discovered by Ms. Rain who helps her find housing.

And there's her therapy sessions with a social worker. Miss Weiss (well played by an intentional frumpy looking Mariah Carey) where Precious questions her interest in herself. But things really get interesting, when Precious' mother wants to reunion (more for financial necessity) with her daughter and new baby.

Instead, Miss Weiss uses their meeting to get the truth out. When Precious; mother makes her stunning confession of crime and jealous shame against her daughter; that surmounts to one of the heart wrenching moments in movies that saddens and sicken in the same breath. When the mother still tries to justify her actions in front of the social worker and her daughter. This ultimately helps resolve issues within that allow Precious to make a final decision towards her mother. in order to move on and provide better for her children than she got.

There is something about films like "Precious" that examines the hardened past in one's life that needs to be overcome to have hope for a better future that seems to occur in films once every few years while tackling certain taboo aspects in one's life..

In fact, "Precious" could be this year's "Monster's Ball" that led Halle Barry to a best actress Oscar that might do the same for the stunning performance by Mo' Nique in Oscar's best supporting role. Director Lee Daniels works this film with raw nerve and honesty that captures the story and characters in full detail and strong performances under his unusual approach that gives this movie its earthy distinction and disturbing elements.

A fascinating and bold movie, "Precious: Based on the Novel Push by Sapphire" is one of the most devastating, socially important films to show a different dimension to black family life that needs attention in our community. Even though this film ends with hope and optimistic for its lead character, The stark reality still exist that this is a cycle that urgently needs to be broken against the mentality some blacks do have as depicted here; that makes them blind and ignorant to the harm and shame their conduct can have on their children

While being a remarkable true story, More important, this film gives an honest and disturbing view to "what goes on behind closed doors", When we often misjudge others, when we prejudice. Director Lee Daniels intends to make his audience uncomfortable to the point of outrage that might break that code of silence and this cycle. One of the year's best, highly recommended and a must-see experience. R; 109 min. A Lionsgate Release - Presented at selected theaters

DISNEY'S A CHRISTMAS CAROL (\*\*\*)

Chicago-born filmmaker Robert Zemeckis continues his 3D stop motion computer animation using the performance process to turn live actors into human-like cartoon characters that made such a life like difference in the 2004's "The Polar Express" and 2007's "Beowulf".

While at the same time, Zemeckis makes his first Disney movie since his 1988 hit, "Who Framed Roger Rabbit" and delivers a faithful rendition of the Charles Dickens classic of the Victorian miser's self redemption through the ghostly spectrum of his past, present and future.

Zemeckis' vision of the Dickens classic is quite dark and gothic that recalls and possibly is paying homage to the best screen version made that starred Alastair Sim in 1951. While avoiding much of the gaiety of the 1970 Albert Finney movie musical version, "Scrooge"

Jim Carrey who has been, and isn't that far from being a real life cartoon character himself (Remember "The Mask"?) is quite subdued as he comes close to the British adaptation as Ebenezer Scrooge, with the most distinctive voice and facial caricature in a multitude of voices and characters Carrey performs here as Scrooge in three stages of his life along with its ghostly spirits.

If you were expecting Jim Carrey to be all over the place, he is all over the place in different characters under varied voices that are not always recognizable. But this is a strong, uniformed collaboration between Zemeckis and Carrey who work from the same page here.

As familiar as the story, Zemeckis literally wants his film to take flight and draw its audience into the Victorian era, its town and people. While Zemeckis keeps Carrey in check while he puts emphasis into visual imagery and imagination within Scrooge being literally transported through the years by the ghostly spirits.

From the outset, Scrooge is an obviously deplorable human being to be around; filled with contempt and bitterness. A man who gets back at others by his stinginess with money. As shown in the opening scene when he barely pays the funeral director, but makes back the money by removing the two coins off his dead partner Markley's eye lids.

And there is Scrooge's resentfulness toward the happiness and joy that surrounds him that eluded his life. Mainly because of the mistakes and choices he made early in his life that are unfolded to him through the flaming head of the ghost of Christmas past.

While the other spirits do their part, the hefty ghost of Christmas Present on atop a Christmas tree that shows Scrooge's current impact of his demeanor on others. And the darkly robed sinister form of Christmas Yet to Come who shows what needs to be changed within Scrooge before he joins and ends up like his deceased partner.

Zemeckis delivers a prestigious and polished treatment that this film deserves and captures the brilliance in tone and texture. And yet, there may be some difficulty with this film's moral effort not being crystal clear enough over the ominous mood that dominates this movie. Still, you get the idea.

However, Zemeckis' "A Christmas Story" rivals the best intentions, but seems to belabor the point. And is not clear cut enough on its moral theme on Ebenezer Scrooge as compared to James Stewart's George Bailey in director Frank Capra's 1946 sentimental and perennial classic, "It's Wonderful Life:"

And yet there are times, without emphasizing much within this screen rendition; that seems to represent some of our own daily frustrations. As to our current recession concerns; There is time to hope and pray that we will get our priorities straight against the forces that seem to conspire for a society based on the "have" and "have nots". G; 96min. A Walt Disney Pictures Release - Presented at selected theaters.

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*Tali Bakhit is a visionary journalist, writer, entrepreneur, and owner of her own company Bon-chic Productions. Born and raised in the inner city of Philadelphia, she knows the struggles that young African American sisters go through on the everyday basis. As a writer for the the North Lawndale Community Newspaper, Tali has made a loyal commitment to give back to the Sisters and prove yes we can all get along and create a since of loyalty. Peace & Light My sisters.*



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