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Expulsions fail city, Jordan 3

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Three Jordan High School students were expelled by the Durham school board following the recommendation of Superintendent Ann Denlinger in a memo written to board members. The board voted 4-3, along racial lines in favor of the expulsions, the first expulsions since the 1992 merger that formed the Durham Public Schools.

Denlinger wrote in the memo that the three students deserved a more stringent punishment than the long-term suspensions 16 others received, partly because they have a record of threatening other students and drawing them into gangs.

"Very simply put, the principal of Jordan High School has significant evidence that these students are completely uncontrollable, have no regard for the safety or welfare of others, and that they do not come to school for any purpose other than to 'do business' and recruit gang members," she said.

The students involved in the Sept. 9 brawl at Jordan should have been punished for their actions. However, expelling three students is not going to comprehensively address the gang problem in Durham nor further Durham Public Schools' duty to provide a quality education to all children.

Expelling 'gang members' will not prevent gang recruitment, nor actively diminish youth gang involvement. Gangs create glorified myths that are very attractive to young recruits, and often these myths become the foundation for young aspirations.

Denlinger was correct in writing that school violence does not start in the schools and that "the solution to this problem lies with the City of Durham, County of Durham, our families, our neighborhoods and our communities of faith."

Broad-based community collaboration is basic for success, but the school must also play a central role by educating all students, traditionally or vocationally, to decrease the glorification and likelihood of gang activity among Durham students.

About 95 percent of hardcore gang members are high school dropouts, according to national statistics. Gang members articulate the ideology that school cannot prepare students to survive in society. The school system

must emphasize that four years of high school will prepare students for college, thus the job market will be open to them on a competitive level.

Gangs have created a system of education and employment that is much more responsive to their needs and destructive to the Durham community. Education cannot be seen as the cornerstone of an intellectual society when school administrators and board members are willing to divest a student of that entitlement as a means of disciplinary action.

Deterrence is not an unrealistic approach because the opportunistic nature of crime, coupled with the risk of personal injury and/or being sent to jail. Many gang members could be lured away from the gang culture by positive alternatives such as a chance to learn a skill and obtain employment thus the need for an alternative other than expulsion.

Gang enterprise, justified through the gang system of values, incorporated into the gang structure and embraced by the gang as an acceptable economic foundation for the gang society, will prove to be a monumental challenge for communities determined to eliminate the gang phenomenon.

It is important to uphold and secure the rights of all students but the right to an equal and fair education of those expelled should not be ignored.

Education must be considered part of the responsibility of society to pass on the necessary things students need to participate productively and responsibly in society. Denying those students an education only contribute to the justification of joining gangs.

Sherwood Anderson once said, "The whole object of education is to develop the mind."

Students must be able to apply scientific knowledge and technique, let alone read and write, in order for society as a whole to progress. Expulsion hinders students from acquiring those skills.

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