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EDITORIAL

It's time for Cobb school board, super to ...

CALL OFF THE DOGS

Cobb educators can breathe a little easier — but only a little — in the wake of last week's decision by the Cobb County School District to dismiss a long string of charges against Awtrey Middle School Principal Jeff Crawford. The system had "thrown the book" at Crawford (a 21-year veteran educator), accusing him of incompetency, insubordination and willful neglect of duty for not promptly reporting an alleged off-campus sexual assault involving two seventh graders.

The District's decision comes on the heels of the news that the Cobb solicitor general's office had dismissed similar charges against former Kell High School Principal Trudie Donovan, who saw her career end under a cloud after 34 years spent educating Cobb's children. Her alleged mistake was her failure to report that a former teacher had slapped a student's backside and another student's face while in the classroom. But the solicitor determined there was insufficient evidence to prove she had "willfully and knowingly" failed to promptly report the information.

Still pending is the case of Tapp Middle School Principal Dr. Jerry Dority (a 28-year school veteran) and counselor Yatta Collins. The two are charged with failing to report that a child was molested and attempted suicide. Both were later fired for failing to report information that Collins heard second-hand and Dority third-hand.

As we have noted in this space before, hearsay evidence is inadmissible in a U.S. court of law — but it is sufficient grounds to fire seasoned teachers and principals in Cobb County.

The hopeful news, slender though it may be, is that some in the system might finally be beginning to see the light, as evidenced by the decision to drop the charges against Crawford. But such a change in heart seems to have come too late for Dority and Collins, two educators that the system's human resources department threw to the wolves.

School Board Chairman Randy Scamihorn recently told this newspaper that "if policies and procedures need to be changed, then that needs to be what happens. ... I feel like that whatever the issues are, they need to be looked at in the immediate future."

Such comments are a good start. And the decision to drop the charges against Crawford was another good step. But it should have been evident to all of the board and Superintendent Dr. Michael Hinojosa well before now that the system's integrity and reputation were being blackened by the central office's overzealous enforcement of the state's "failure to report" law.

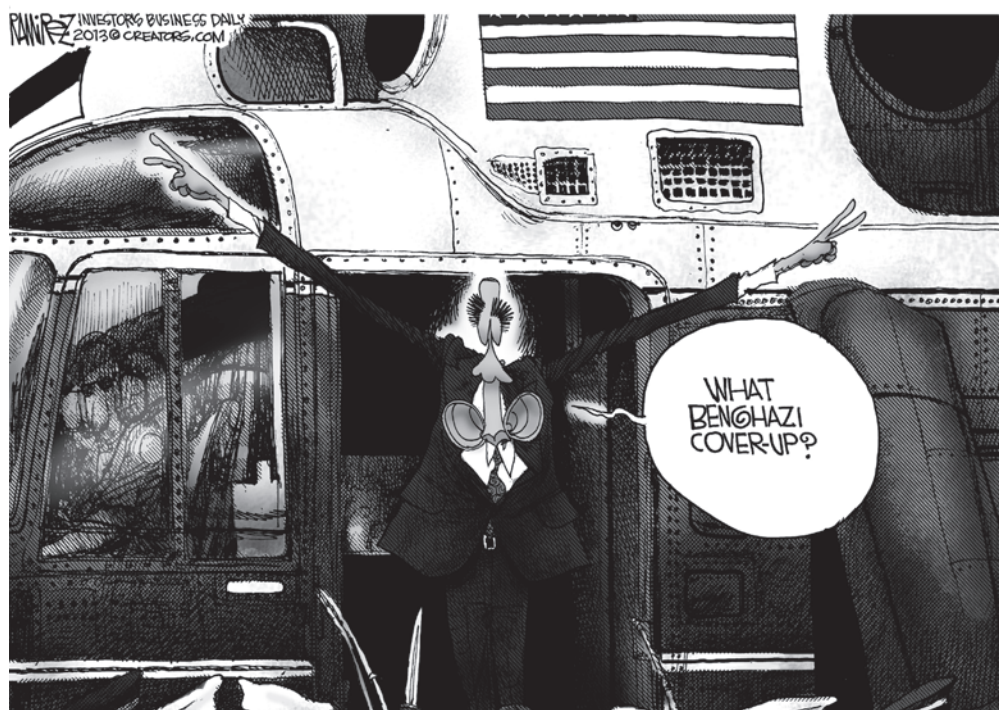
Those prosecutions have not only come close to ruining the careers and reputations of respected Cobb educators, but also wasted the system's resources. In addition, they now very possibly have put Cobb taxpayers on the hook for the legal fees those unjustly accused by the system have incurred while trying to defend themselves.

Instead of placid deference to the superintendent, the school board needs to assert its authority and tell him to call off the dogs, so to speak.

Cobb's teachers and principals shouldn't have to constantly be looking over their shoulders. Their jobs are difficult enough already.



THE DRAWING BOARD



COMMENTARY

LaGrange College senior triumphs over ...

LIFE-ALTERING EVENT

This is the story of courage. This is a story of tenacity. This is the story of Hill Daniel.

Daniel, a 21-year-old senior at LaGrange College, will be graduating next week with a degree in psychology after a distinguished college career in which he served as president of the Student Government Association, a Presidential Student Ambassador, a youth soccer coach and an intern with the Troup County Drug Court.



Dick Yarbrough
OPINION CONTRIBUTOR

Hill Daniel is also a paraplegic.

On November 12, 2008, while returning from a youth group gathering at his church, the Monroe County native fish-tailed the car he was driving on a gravel road and overturned. His younger brother, Matthew, got out with a cut behind his ear. Hill was not so lucky. He was trapped and had to be cut out by the local EMTs, who realized immediately the severity of his injury and transported him to the trauma unit at the Medical Center in Macon.

Forty-eight hours later, he was at the renowned Shepherd Center in Atlanta for surgery. Spinal cord damage had left him paralyzed from the waist down. He was 17 years old at the time, and Christmas was a month away.

His father, Jackson Daniel, assistant superintendent of support services in the Monroe County school system, told me the family was planning to bring a Christmas tree to Shepherd. Hill told them not to bother. He said he would be home for Christmas. He was as good as his word. The

young man began rehabilitation therapy three days after his surgery and the staff at the Shepherd Center let him go home for Christmas, although he was to come back for more surgery after the holidays.

Hill Daniel returned to Mary Persons High School in Forsyth to finish his senior year. He was named captain of the soccer team. (His dad said he was

announced in the starting lineup at each game his senior year.) During spring break, father and son travelled with a school group to Italy and France for eight days. Jackson Daniel called it "a most difficult trip, but one that made us realize that if we could do that just five months into his injury, we could do anything."

In July 2009, Hill Daniel secured two additional merit badges and, with the help and support of members of Scout Troop 101, attained the rank of Eagle Scout.

I called this amazing young man in LaGrange last week to congratulate him on his upcoming graduation and to see how he had managed to accomplish so much after such a life-altering experience. He gives high marks to the good people at the Shepherd Center for their role in his difficult transition.

"The Shepherd Center created a new life for me," he said. "They molded me from who I was into who I am today."

I am sure the Shepherd Center staff would tell you that Hill Daniel gave them a lot to work with.

What has he learned since that fateful November night?

"During high school, things came easy to me and always seemed to fall in place," he says. "Now I realize that life can be difficult, but our only limitations are the ones we put on ourselves. I know we can be as successful as we want to be, but we have to work hard at it. My situation has taught me to never give up on yourself. Find something you like to do, do it the best you can and you can be happy."

Remember that advice the next time you start feeling sorry for yourself. Life is what we make of it, and Hill Daniel has set the bar high for us all.

In what is a wonderful coda to this story, the commencement speaker at LaGrange College's graduation ceremonies on May 18 will be James Shepherd, chairman of the board of the Shepherd Center, who will also receive an honorary degree. I suspect Mr. Shepherd would say that seeing Hill Daniel graduate after having overcome so much at such a young age and knowing the role the Shepherd Center played in this remarkable story might be honor enough.

On another subject: I am mourning the loss of Jerry Wansley today. Not only was he a friend, but he and I had the privilege of serving as co-grandfathers to the Wansley boys, Zack and Nick. Jerry and I have grieved together and rejoiced together.

I am honored to have made the journey with him. God bless him and his memory.

You can reach Dick Yarbrough at yarb2400@bellsouth.net or P.O. Box 725373, Atlanta, Georgia 31139.

Are you (fill in the blank) enough to matter?

Enough with this "enough" business. Latest to the question of whether a person is sufficiently identifiable as belonging to a particular demographic is Ted Cruz — the conservative Texas senator who happens to be of Hispanic descent.

But is he Hispanic enough? For what, his family taco recipe? Before you send in the sensitivity police, permit me to finish, *por favor*.

The suggestion that Cruz might not qualify as a representative Hispanic comes from a fellow Hispanic, former U.N. Ambassador and New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson.

Richardson was asked whether Cruz, who opposes immigration reform as currently proposed, represents most Hispanics with his views.

Richardson replied: "Almost every Hispanic in the country wants to see immigration reform. No, I don't think he should be defined as a Hispanic."

Translation: If you disagree with the consensus of the demographic to which you belong, whether black, female, gay, Hispanic or whatever, then you are essentially not part of the conver-

sation. At least not the one that matters — the vote-organizing constituency.

President Obama suffered similarly from a not-black-enough trope that began circulating when he first emerged as the potential Democratic candidate. His truly African-American bona fides aside, his civil rights resume was lacking and his ancestors hadn't been slaves. What could the son of a Kenyan know about being a black American?

Leading this charge was Jesse Jackson, who also led the movement to popularize the term African-American in the 1980s and insisted on its mainstream adoption. To Jackson, who marched with Martin Luther King, Obama was a neophyte pretender.

Obama obviously succeeded in convincing African-Americans, including Jackson, that he was qualified to bear the mantle of his demographic. Once elected, he strategically identified with blacks in public ways. He stepped up to the plate in defense of Harvard professor Henry

Louis Gates Jr. when a white cop insisted that he prove ownership of the house he occupied. The iconic beer summit followed. And Obama identified Trayvon Martin, the black teen fatally shot by a neighborhood vigilante, as someone who could have been his son.

Others have been hauled before the court of identity politics, especially pro-life women. The official women's position is "pro-choice," and any who have sincere moral objections to the destruction of life in the womb are considered outliers to the cause of liberation.

Likewise, those who lament the tragic consequences of the dissolution of the traditional family, meaning a mother and a father, are quickly marginalized as bigots with a gay problem. The *ipso facto* zero sum-ness of our so-called discourse produces a quagmire of absolutism where truth is the ultimate victim.

Thus, we come to Cruz. Cruz is one of those politicians whom people love or hate. Nearly everyone has a Cruz story

— *suddenly!* — because to not have a Cruz story is to *not* be in the know. He's the flavor du jour and, therefore, is variously subject to elevation and denigration as dictated by that barometer of relevance, trending on social media.

Given our litmus politics, Cruz is necessarily being scrutinized for his stance on immigration. As a Hispanic, he must be in favor of amnesty, or a "path to citizenship," if you prefer.

For the record, I personally favor such a path. Realistically, I see no humane way to export 11 million souls, many of whom, not incidentally, constitute a significant wedge of our economic pie. Get rid of farm laborers only if you prefer a \$5 orange.

But Cruz is also a conservative, former law professor and solicitor general of Texas with deep qualms about pretending that laws don't matter. This does not mean he's anti-immigrant, the preferred invective for any who oppose giving special status to people who came here without permission. In a quirk of the

new, diverse Republican Party, the immigration reform legislation Cruz opposes was created in part by fellow Hispanic superstar, Marco Rubio.

Rather than insist that Cruz fall in line, shouldn't we be celebrating a clear victory for true diversity? That is, diversity of thought.

Here we have two conservative Republicans of Hispanic origin who have different views on an important issue. Wasn't this always the point of our grand American experiment?

Freedom means, foremost, freedom to speak without fear of impeachment or censure. And a diverse society succeeds only insofar as diverse ideas are welcomed. Cruz is no more bound by his heritage to fall in line with "almost every Hispanic" than Obama was required to place alms at the feet of those who, by their own analysis, considered themselves blacker than he.

Basta, already. Enough.

Kathleen Parker is a columnist for *The Washington Post*.



Kathleen Parker
COLUMNIST



Ted Cruz