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Data Zone Page 6

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Ekhaya Youth Project

Helping Families Throughout Louisiana

EKHAYA Youth Project

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City Recieves Funding, Helps Homeless Population

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Louisiana ranks last in school quality.

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Ekhaya Youth Project Assists Youth in NOLA



Darrin L. Harris is the CEO of Ekhaya Youth Project.

Eric Craig
Multimedia Editor

In the State of Louisiana one organization is helping keep youth off of the street. Darrin L. Harris is the Chief Executive Officer of Ekhaya Youth Project. His main goal; To keep challenged youth off of the streets.

Harris has dedicated his life to helping youth throughout the greater New Orleans Area, state-wide and nationally. Through music, art and state-sponsored help, Harris has influenced many in the Louisiana youth population to be more responsible in their lives and their surroundings.

The Ekhaya Youth Project has grown since its founding. In 2007, Harris was the only employee at his youth-centered start up. In 2016, Harris boasts over 600 employees working with the Ekhaya Youth Project in 64 parishes. Together, Harris and his employees service over 2000 youth and families across Louisiana.

Ekhaya has expanded its efforts nationally with its recent eerostigma.org campaign, which encourages people to seek mental health help despite the stigma that may surround it in certain communities.

How it Started

Ekhaya Youth Project started in 2007 after Harris took a missionary trip to a township outside of Durbin, South Africa. Harris visited the town's multicultural art center, which was an area dedicated to youth. The center focused on arts, and offered a recording studio, a stage, filming equipment and more. The center was designed to be an area where youth can express themselves.

The word Ekhaya is defined as a home in a way people can bring all kinds of shared values and ideas to the table, Harris said.

"It was like a city operated and made for young people," Harris added.

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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Cover Story, Continued from page 2.



Ekhaya Youth Project and its ZeroStigma.org Campaign were featured at Essence Fest 2016.

Harris met with several young people at the center. He was inspired by what they did in their small township.

"Every morning I think about those young people. They remind me that if you're going to do this work without action, it is only a dream," Harris said.

After returning from his trip to South Africa, Harris knew he wanted to start a non-profit that helped the lives of youth. He did research in the greater New Orleans area and looked for more youth-centered areas that needed more support. Harris held several focus groups with New Orleans youth to determine what the City lacks.

Collecting Grants

Over the years Harris has become appreciative of the opportunities to apply for grants that enabled him to help the state's youth.

The Ekhaya Youth Project was awarded grants by the Rockefeller Foundation and the PeyBack Foundation to bolster the youth project's goal of mentoring at-risk youth in New Orleans.

In 2011, Harris notes that the project was selected for a grant by the U.S. Housing and Urban Development to create a program that put challenged, homeless youth off the streets in homes.

The Grant helped Ekhaya sponsor 26 homeless youth that aged out of the Foster Care System. Many youth enrolled in this program were



The Ekhaya Youth Project has 600 employees and reaches over 2000 families.

living in abandoned buildings, cars on property. Harris's organization partnered with several landlords to take the youth out of the street.

"100 percent had a mental health diagnosis. 85 percent had aged out of foster care and ended up homeless. None of them had basic life skills to maintain their homes," Harris said.

Throughout the program, Harris found ways to help the youth become more independent. Harris sponsored the youth in their program for over 2 years.

Becoming First Nation Wide

The Ekhaya Youth Project made history when it partnered with the State of Louisiana in a statewide family support organization. Specifically, Ekhaya would become an actor in the Louisiana Behavioral Health Partnership.

Harris, looking for ways to expand the Ekhaya Youth Project, wrote a proposal to the State of Louisiana to assist the state in helping families that have youth with intellectual disabilities and behavioral disorders.

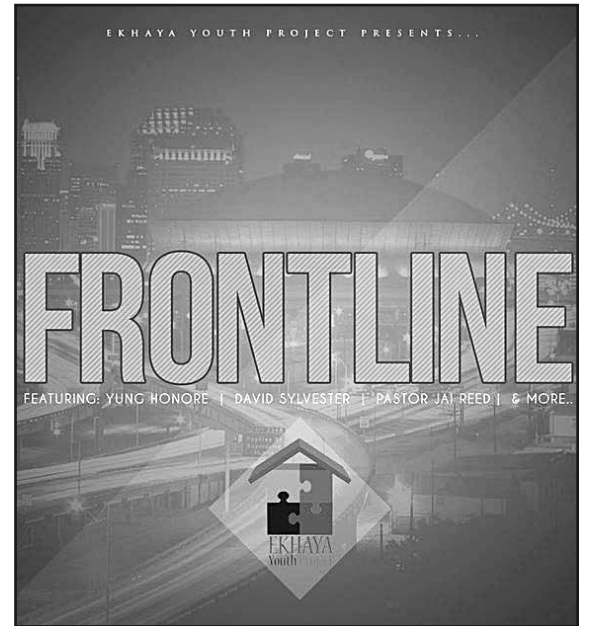
"We were one of two agencies

selected to deliver an oral presentation on why our organization would best assist the state. I used it as an opportunity to show what Ekhaya has done. We shared the stories of people that we helped," Harris said.

"We became Louisiana's first statewide Family Organization dealing with behavioral and mental health challenges," he added.

The Ekhaya Youth Project works with parents by linking them with one of its 500 peers. Many of the peers, according to Harris, have had first-hand experience about being at-risk for homelessness, and other issues stemming from families. The goal of the youth project is to prevent more of New Orleans at-risk youth from being in the hospital, streets and grave, Harris said.

The Ekhaya Youth Project has used music to encourage youth to cooperate with family and services. According to Harris, Ekhaya has released two studio albums that discuss the struggles that many of the peers and families have experienced.



Frontline is one of the Ekhaya Youth Project's Albums that voices concerns of at-risk youth.

Mental Health

The Ekhaya Youth Project has expanded from statewide to nationally with its new Mental Health Campaign.

Partnered with the Ekhaya Youth Project, the ZeroStigma.org Campaign is a "no shame, no blame," movement that encourages people to seek mental health assistance despite the negative stigma in particular communities.

"We don't talk about mental behavior in the community. We have developed the culture of better not say anything out the issue," Harris said.

"We started Zero Stigma.org as a national movement that initially started as a campaign to get employees, but turned into something greater that is helping people," he added.

The movement is a national movement designed to make more people aware of the mental health issues that plague several communities.

"In doing this movement we say no shame no blame. What's happening is people gain access to quality healthcare. When they have access they get help, they get hope and they get healing," Harris said.

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City Receives \$800K Grant to Provide Services to Homeless Population

Data News Staff Edited Report

Mayor Mitch Landrieu, the New Orleans Health Department and the Office of Community Development in partnership with UNITY of Greater New Orleans, the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) and Metropolitan Human Services District (MHSD) announced that the City of New Orleans has received an \$800,000 Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to provide housing and mental health services to the City's homeless population. The grant will support the Health Department's newly-developed New Orleans Equity and Inclusion Initiative, which will provide permanent supportive

housing services, mental health and substance abuse treatment and recovery services, assistance in obtaining Medicaid and other benefits for 120 individuals who are chronically homeless and another 20 vulnerable homeless families with children.

"The City of New Orleans is committed to helping our homeless residents," Mayor Landrieu said. "The City and over 60 homelessness service providers that make up the Continuum of Care are constantly conducting outreach and this grant will allow us to continue to make a real difference in lives of our most vulnerable. This is yet another example of us working to connect homeless individuals and families with the essential services they need to put them back on the



Mayor Mitch Landrieu

path towards stable, permanent housing and prosperity."

The purpose of the New Orleans Equity and Inclusion Initiative is to end chronic homelessness and family homelessness in New Orleans and reduce the inequities in access to and use of mental health and substance abuse recovery support services for the homeless population. The City and its partners are working to meet their goals of ending chronic homelessness for people with disabilities by July 4, 2017, and ending fam-

ily homelessness by Thanksgiving 2016. This initiative will play a significant role in meeting those goals.

Right now, sixty-five percent of New Orleans' chronic homeless population do not have health insurance. This initiative aims to ensure that healthcare services, including the state's recently-expanded Medicaid Program, are accessible to this difficult-to-reach population.

"We have been focused on improving the quality of life for all New Orleanians, across the board, particularly for the most vulnerable in our community," said Director of Health Charlotte Parent. "This program will not only ensure that some of our homeless population receive stable housing, but also help them to overcome the serious behavioral health issues that so many face."



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Data News Weekly Prepares to Celebrate 50th Anniversary

Data Staff Report

New Orleans Data News Weekly is elated to announce its 50th Anniversary Celebration on August 25-26, 2016. Data News Weekly has served the City of New Orleans for a half a century, providing the community with African-American based news and information. From its humble beginnings 50 years ago, the organization continues to sustain its legacy as a leading provider in African-American news in New Orleans.

This year there will be two celebration recognizing Data News Weekly's half Century accomplishment. On August 25, 2016, Data News Weekly will celebrate its 2015-16 Trailblazers. On August 26th, for the first time in the newspaper's history, Data News Weekly will host a Celebration Gala where they will present their First Annual Golden Service Award; they will recognize six recipients that have positively impacted communities throughout the City, state and nation.

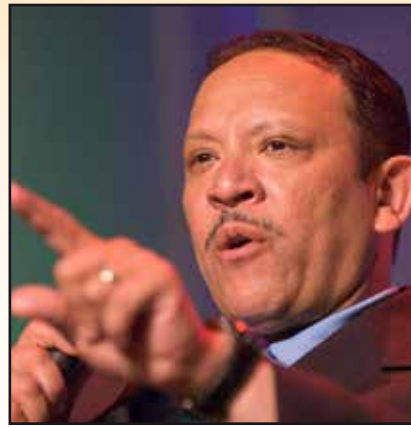
Throughout the month of August, stay tuned to ladatanews.com and @DataNewsWeek on Twitter and Instagram for updates regarding the events.

The History

Staying true to its motto as "The People's Paper" Data News Weekly continues to support the New Orleans Community since its creation in 1966. The paper was initially founded by Joseph "Scoop" Jones, who worked as one



Former NOLA Mayor and National Urban League CEO & President Marc H. Morial and DNC Vice-Chairwoman Donna Brazile will be honored with the Golden Service Award as Data News Weekly celebrates its 50th Anniversary on Friday, August 26, 2016.



of the few African-American war correspondents during World War II. At the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Scoop envisioned the need to create a newspaper that would empower the African-American voice during trying times in U.S. history.

Throughout the years, Data News Weekly has become more than just a newspaper. Nicknamed "The People's Paper," Data News serves as an institution for the African-American Community of New Orleans and beyond. The paper continues to resonate with its readers, as well as serve as a conduit for New Orleans corporations and small businesses to reach its local market.

In the wake of the 50th Anniversary of Data News Weekly, the paper continues to unfold stories of community lead-

ers, entertainers, and businesses in the African-American Community in New Orleans. Under the current leadership of Terry Jones, the son of Scoop Jones, the legacy of African-American promotion continues. Since taking over the paper in the late 1980's, Terry Jones has cultivated Data News, growing it from a small niche publication with a local reach to a nationally recognized, award-winning paper. New Orleans Data News Weekly, under Terry Jones' leadership, has received the New America Exceptional Communicator Award (2006) and the NNPA/Chrysler Award/Honorable Mention (2006) for its coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Today, Data News Weekly is embracing the convergence of media. In the recognition of the half-century mark, Data

News Weekly has dedicated itself to sustain and expand beyond its 60,000 print circulation. Through the use of photos, videos and a new-and-improved website (coming soon), Data News Weekly will continue to engage its readers in new ways, and to continue the promotion of news and people within the African-American Community in the City, state and nation. At the beginning of the 50th Anniversary, Data News Weekly continues to remain "The People's Paper," by recognizing its achievements and stories in the past, and continuing the development of new stories for the New Orleans Community in the future.

The Celebration

On August 25th and 26th New Orleans Data News Weekly will hold its 50th Anniversary Celebration.

On Thursday, August 25, 2016, The Trailblazer Award Ceremony will be held at the Regency Reception Hall located on 7300 Downman Road, New Orleans LA, 70126. The event begins at 7:00 p.m. The ceremony will kick off with an award reception for the 2015-2016 trailblazers featured in Data News Weekly. The trailblazing event will feature free Hors d'oeuvre (refreshments) and a cash bar. Tickets are available for presale for \$15 or can be bought at the door for \$20. The Trailblazer Award tickets can also be purchased through WBOK by calling 504-942-0106.

Data Zone,
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Congo Square on Sundays

Kaelin Maloid
Data News Weekly
Contributor

Every Sunday in Congo Square, located in Armstrong Park, there is an ancestral ritual with a spiritual drumming, singing and chanting ceremony from 3-5 p.m. Open to the public, the Congo Square Preservation Society invites everyone over for drumming, singing, and chanting. People are invited to play the drums, and they are also invited to learn the African dances. Photos by Kaelin Maloid.



DATA NEWS WEEKLY'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY & TRAILBLAZER AWARDS

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Will Anything Really Change After the Deaths of Sterling, Gerald and Long?

By Candace J. Semien
Louisiana Black Publishers
Columnist

Leaving the city of Baker, Louisiana, I turned left onto the interstate faster than I normally would. I needed to get home before the Matadors arrived. I was the third car to merge onto the empty bridge; the third to veer into the center lane. Instinctively, I looked to my left, across the Interstate that was empty, too. I saw a large SUV on the side of the highway. The red and blue lights of a state police cruiser flashed behind it. Man, I got my first ticket in that same spot. The speed limit changed and I bet he missed the sign just like I had.

The driver was a heavy Black man, wearing a pink-colored shirt with a huge, Polo logo. I



Mourners leave stuffed animals and flowers outside of the Triple S Convenience Store where Alton Sterling was shot and killed by Baton Rouge police officers. (The Drum)

The enormity of the supporters who were there to see him off was breathtaking. Cars lined the streets beneath the interstate. Those drivers and passengers also stood outside their cars and watched. The 72nd St. Bridge crossed over I-10 and a crowd lined the bridge.

Car after car, police cruiser after cruiser rolled by. I sat there for four minutes with the mourning ember pulsing within. Violent death became real?—even surreal?—in that moment. Like it did when Sterling's 15-year-old son, Cameron, wailed on television, begging for his father.

This is post-friendly Baton Rouge.

Although there were no "Blue Lives Matter" signs; no "Justice for Alton" signs, the weight of the city's invisible fighting was thick in the atmosphere. Yes, we can comfort in times like this, but can we love enough?—love Officer Matthew Gerald enough or love Alton Sterling enough or even love Gavin Long enough?—to do the hard work of breaking the hold hate has over this city?

So many of us are hurting, carrying our own ambers of grief that are fueled by constant wrongdoings by angry, violent men. And, a scene like this stirs the flame. But there are so many of us like the little girl on the side standing with her mother, waving her hands frantically at the superstar in the black limo hearse. She's glad to see all the activity, but oblivious to the ripples of its effect.

She'd been told, I'm sure, that the superhero died trying to protect "us." That the reasons for their deaths were for a purpose larger than her young intellect could process. That things will change, because the person in the black car died. And that's true. Things will change because they died...because all of them died.

I could hear my blinker reminding me it was time to get home.

I turned to go home, but not before I prayed for citywide comfort and special love for Sterling, Gerald, and Long.

Candace is a contributor at The Drum Newspaper. The Drum is a member publication of the National Newspaper Publishers Association.

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slowed down. We all did. We all were watching.

It was post-Alton Sterling Baton Rouge, and we were all watching out for our brothers. The ones in pink and the ones in blue. I was still driving the third car. We were down to 30mph, watching across six lanes of highway. At the top of the interstate was another car about 100 yards behind the officer. Maybe she was watching, too. My son asked, "Mom, what's that?" I had no answer for him nor for the ember of fear peaking inside of me.

Then, there were three cars in the row and four more. A woman stood at the front of her truck a few steps on to the empty north-bound lane. She pointed south. Driving 20 mph now, it was still just the three of us in a row. Slowly. Pensive. Heading south.

As the interstate curved away from the airport, there were more police cars. Between the fifth and sixth cruiser, a father stood in a yellow shirt. The toddler on his shoulders balanced his chubby cheek at the top of Dad's head. They were looking south, waiting. We drove slowly past three cruisers to my right. Their lights flashing, but their eyes and bodies watched the bend of the Highway awaiting something. It was ominous. My heart got heavier. Something's not right. This isn't good. I felt the ember grow.

I unconsciously counted 30 cars across the highway and a dozen

on my side. Just at the bottom of the hill through the larger curve nearest Southern University, the line of cars stretched for miles the length of the side rails. Drivers and passengers stood with cameras. A few held flags. I slowed and put on my blinkers.

Someone was coming. Was it the president? No, my gut ached. You know it's not him, I said to myself.

This is post-Gavin Long Baton Rouge.

Then, I remembered that the Louisiana National Cemetery was 25 miles north, and this was the procession for Baton Rouge Police Officer Matthew Gerald, who'd been killed on duty. I glided over to the median and watched about a hundred police motorcycles zoom past. A hundred. Bikers with American flags and police union flags roared by. There were hundreds of cars on the side of the road in front of me now.

The heavy ember of anxiety was now grief. More police followed. More bikers and more bystanders. Young and old. One man leaned against his cane and watched the cars. I saw the bystanders, four or so of them, sprinkled up the sideline of I-10 with their hands raised in salute. One lady held her hands to her mouth holding the tears in her throat.

My sentiments exactly, lady.

Each face?—including my own?—bore a contortion of mourning and pride.

Spiritually Speaking....

Faith is a Verb



James A. Washington
NNPA News Wire
Columnist

Scripture says you should live your life in such a way that those around you can see the Jesus in you. "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16. I know that sounds good. But what does it really mean? The only explanation that works for me is the one that talks about service, i.e. doing something in the name of the

Lord. I still believe faith is a verb.

We all know no one can live a perfect life. But it shouldn't take a district attorney's cross-examination to figure out where a person is coming from. The man who professes to love Jesus shouldn't be okay with cheating on his wife, be content with a life of crime, or rationalize illicit sex, drugs and satanic rock and roll. If so, then the Lord cannot be your leader, nor Christ your example. We've all done it to some degree, but at some point in your supposed walk with God, your behavior, your obedience, your principles and integrity must shine through. Perfection may be impossible, but serious effort is not only possible, it's mandatory. You've got to give it your best shot each and every day. You can and will fall short, but it shouldn't be for lack of

effort. I forget who said, if you try you might fail. But if you don't try, you're guaranteed to fail. Please note that God requires effort.

Allow me to testify about what I know to be true. My Bible says the closer we come to Jesus, the more we experience the blessings of God. And why wouldn't we? After all, those are Jesus' footprints in the snow. The path to righteousness is clear. The goal is simple. Be in right relationship with God. "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all things will be given you as well." Matthew 6:33. This 'seeking' to me has always meant working in some capacity. Jesus said, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent me." John 9:4. Now none of us has Jesus' pedigree, but I am not opposed to working for what I want. I've done

it all my life. You probably have too. So the important question is how hard are you willing to work knowing that your very soul is at stake? Just what are you willing to do to let the world know who you are and whose you are?

The good news of the gospel makes it clear that this is easy, if not ridiculously easy. Love God and love your neighbor. In this context love is a verb. Do enough so that the Jesus in you meets the Jesus in me. Do something, anything, that another person can't mistake for anything else but kindness from above. For me, I'm asking God to walk with me in an effort to witness (see this column). I don't exactly have it down yet. I'm finding that it's not something you can study. I do know it's triggered by the recognition that somebody needs to hear,

in my case read, a word from God. You should know that at that particular moment, God has chosen you to deliver His Word. So open your mouth and speak. This work that I am trying to focus on is recognizing that I must let go and let God use me to uplift another human being. For those of you who are used to this, you know this is a very humbling experience. But, "...If a man will not work, he shall not eat...And as for you brothers, never tire of doing what is right..." Thessalonians 3:10-13. In the vernacular of the day, get up. It's time to get busy. May God bless and keep you forever.

James A. Washington is President and Publisher of the Dallas Weekly Newspaper. He can be reached at jaws@dallasweekly.com

Data Zone, Continued from page 6.

On Friday, August 26th Data News Weekly will continue its 50th Anniversary Celebration by honoring six recipients with the People's Golden Service Award. This new award honors six leaders for positively impacting and empowering the African-American Community within the City, state or nation. This year's six recipients include Donna Brazile, Vice-Chairwoman of the Democratic National Committee; Marc Morial, CEO of the National Urban League; Congresswoman Maxine Water, U.S. Representative for California's 43rd District; Tanya Lombard, Assistant Vice-President of AT&T; Jim Farmer, Retired Vice-President of GMAC; and Dan Packer, Former CEO and President of Energy New Orleans Inc.

The award ceremony will take place at Generations Hall, located at 310 Andrew Higgins, New Orleans, LA 70130. The event will feature live entertainment and free food. Event tickets may be bought through Data News Weekly for \$50. For more information on attendance, table reservations and tickets call (504) 821-7421.


For updates on New Orleans Data News Weekly's 50th Anniversary Celebration, please visit ladatanews.com and follow @DataNewsWeek on Twitter and Instagram.



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NORDC Upcoming Back to School Fall Expos

Data News Staff Edited Report

The City of New Orleans announced that the New Orleans Recreation Development Commission (NORDC) will host three Back to School Fall Expos in August. During the expos, families can learn more about NORDC Fall programming, activities and upcoming events like Athletics, Youth and Teen Programs, Fitness, Aquatics, Dance, Arts, NORDC Halloween Spooktacular and Fall Movies in the Park. The NORDC Fall Expos are free and open to the public.

The expos will also feature a School Supply Giveaway, in partnership with several organizations, to help families kick off the new school year. Parents must attend



the Expo with their children to participate in the School Supply Giveaway. Anyone interested in donating school supplies to be given away at the Expo may drop off new and unused school supplies at any NORDC facility or public library.

Several partnering organizations will be at the Expo to register individuals for other Fall Programs being hosted at NORDC sites. Additionally, the New Orleans Public Library, Urban League of New

Orleans, COX, Creole Cuisine and others will be onsite to provide information and resources about the services they offer to the community. Food and refreshments will be provided by Creole Cuisine.

Back to School Fall Expos:
Saturday, August 6, 2016
Behrman Recreation Center,
2529 General Meyer Ave., New Orleans, LA 70114
10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Saturday, August 13, 2016
Lyons Recreation Center, 624
Louisiana Ave., New Orleans, LA 70115



Photo by Sergey Galyonkin

10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Saturday, August 13, 2016
Stallings St. Claude Recreation Center, 4300 St. Claude Ave., New Orleans, LA 70117
10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Anyone interested in register-

ing for NORDC Fall Programming classes is invited to visit the NORDC Recreation Center where the class will be held. For more information on classes, locations, dates and times, please visit www.nordc.org.



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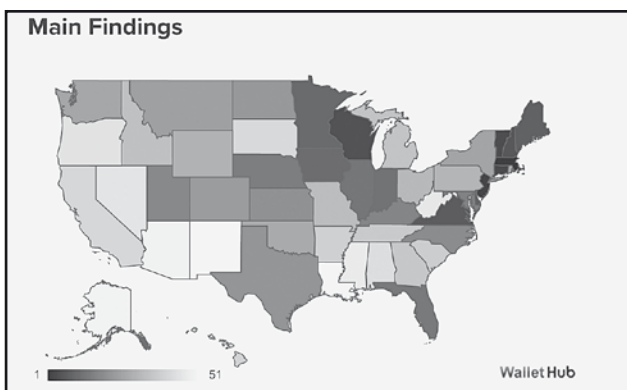
Eric Craig
Multimedia Editor

The beginning of August marks back-to-school season for many. However, according to a study by WalletHub, Louisiana ranks the worst in School Systems in the United States.

In the study conducted by WalletHub, researchers compared several qualities that impact education, such as student-to-teacher ratios, ACT and SAT scores and dropout rates. All 50 states were included in the study, and Washington D.C. was treated separately. In comparison to all 50 other subjects, Louisiana scored last at 51.

Massachusetts ranked first on Wallet Hub's study. The state boasts both a high School System quality and safety ranking. Neighboring state Texas ranked 21 out of 51 in the study. Alabama and Mississippi ranked 42 and 46 respectively.

The State of Louisiana scored lowest on reading, 48, Math, 48, and SAT average, 47 out of 51. The state was ranked 33 as least safe schools in the union. Safe schools, as defined by WalletHub,



Louisiana Ranked 51 in WalletHub's 2016 Best and Worst School System.

was measured by the amount of threats, injury with a weapon on school property between the grades of 9-12th.

According to WalletHub, their study finds that states that have higher income averages tend to have and sustain better School Systems. There reasoning is that higher incomes means more money available from taxes to support the schools in the state.

The state received mixed review on its spending compared to its general ranking. The State of Vermont spends the most public funds on their School System

and ranked fourth in WalletHub's School Ranking System.

So what can states do to improve their School Systems?

Lara Perez-Felkner, an Assistant Professor of Higher

Education and Sociology at Florida State University believes better schools start with disadvantaged areas.

"Investing Primarily in the quality of the strongest schools and students does not intrinsically improve school quality," Perez-Felkner said.

"Rather, it is important for state and local policymakers to invest in the less advantaged schools and students, where the return in the investment tends to be greater," she added.

For more information on the WalletHub study, visit www.wallethub.com

From Crack Baby to Mentor Shawn Blanchard Defies the Odds

By Edward Henderson
NNPA News Wire Contributor

The term 'crack baby' emerged into the social consciousness in the 80's and 90's during the crack epidemic sweeping minority communities. It referred to children who had been exposed to the drug because of their mother's usage during pregnancy. It picked up additional stereotypical connotations that labeled people with a lack of intelligence or propensity for failure in life. Shawn Blanchard is all too familiar with this term. His mother abused crack cocaine while she was pregnant with him. The physical side effects were minimal, however, the emotional toll was a significant barrier to overcome. Blanchard faced these challenges head-on, through hard work, faith, and passion for his purpose of mentorship. These traits lead him to success in education, business and authorship. His book "How About that for a Crack Baby" chronicles his journey towards success and empowers others with the confidence to do the same.

Blanchard was born in Detroit, Michigan and spent his developmental years living with his grandmother because his parents couldn't decide who was going to keep him. Blanchard's mother was a professional shoplifter and didn't have much contact with his father. There wasn't much of a support system around him either. Of his 7 brothers, most ended up dead or in jail and when his Grandmother passed away when Blanchard was 12, he took most of the responsibility for his younger siblings.

"I learned some pretty interesting things about hustling," said Blanchard. "I sold weed and other drugs. I did what I thought I had to do in order to make ends meet."

Blanchard went to a school with 40 percent graduation rate, but excelled in academics and was active in student government. He went on to study at the University of Michigan but his dual life eventu-



Shawn Blanchard is the CEO of Shawn Blanchard Productions, which focuses on public speaking, publishing mentorship, entrepreneurship and the image of excellence. (Shawn Blanchard Productions)

ally caught up with him. Blanchard continued to hustle on the side while he was at school in order to support himself and his family. He got caught selling drugs at school, and he spent three days and three nights in jail his sophomore year.

"I felt like I let a lot of people down," said Blanchard. "I felt like I was the one who was supposed to make sure I show people how to pave the way so you can be great no matter where you came from. I wasn't doing that at the time. I needed to make a pivot."

During his time in jail, Blanchard found a Bible in his cell and gave his life to God. From that moment, he promised if he was able to be delivered from this situation he would develop his life and make sure young people didn't go the same route he chose. Because of his good standing at school and relationships he built, Blanchard's professors helped to bail him out and he was able to continue his education without expulsion. He graduated with his degree in math and economics in 2005 and went on to get his masters in secondary math education in New York.

"I thought I was going to get kicked out, that's when God kicked in," said Blanchard.

In New York, Blanchard co-founded a mentoring program to reach out to young men with similar backgrounds as his growing up. He even temporarily adopted one of the young men in the program who was in particularly bad shape at the time. When he graduated, however, the young man had become class president, touted a 3.8 GPA and was accepted to every college he applied to.

News coverage from the temporary adoption prompted a publishing company to reach out to learn more about the story. When they heard about Blanchard's background, they asked him to write a book for them. His book entitled, "How About that for a Crack Baby," delves into the details of his past and how he overcame everything that was in his way.

"People can expect an emotional roller coaster," said Blanchard. "It's going to entertain you, it's going to show you how you can do anything you want to do, it's going to challenge you to mentor and be men-

tored."

The young author moved back to Detroit to go to law school and the book came out five years later. He spent time teaching math at this alma mater, started a fitness company and became a co-owner of a custom suit company. Blanchard continued his work as a mentor in the mayor's office as the director of youth services. He's helping ignite President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative in the city of Detroit.

Today, Blanchard is the CEO of Shawn Blanchard Productions, which focuses on public speaking, publishing mentorship, entrepreneurship and the image of excellence.

"I'm excited about duplicating greatness," said Blanchard. "I want to keep making sure I raise the bar, so more people start falling into the rule instead of the exception."

To learn more about Blanchard and his company visit www.iamshawnblanchard.com/

Edward Henderson is a reporter for The San Diego Voice and Viewpoint.

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