

## Debate on MLK's day: College vs. jobs as best way to achieving a dream

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Arguing that jobs can be the means by which people achieve their dreams, state Sen. Carole Migden spoke in favor of vocational education during Monday's celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in Marin City.

"Our schools need job training and vocational education," Migden, D-San Francisco, told a crowd at the Manzanita Community Center. "We need people who can repair cars. We need people who can fix the locks on our doors. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be sending our students to college. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't become scientists, nurses, teachers. But we have to give them the opportunity to have jobs."

Migden's address followed a discussion of equality in education by activists, leaders and Marin City residents. Organizers of the event, including the Marin City Network and Grassroots Leadership Network of Marin, said they hoped to remove the roadblocks to educational opportunity facing Marin City's largely black population.

Only 17 percent of Marin residents age 24 and older who are Latino or black have a bachelor's degree, compared with 56 percent of Marin residents who are white or Asian, according to the Grassroots Leadership Network.

As many as 7.4 percent of Latino students and 9 percent of black students drop out of school, and only 19.4 percent of Latinos and 16.1 percent of blacks meet grade-level requirements, the network said.

Those statistics came as no surprise to Beverly Freeman, a member of the Black Student Union at the College of Marin.

"We know what the situation is," Freeman said. "We keep hearing the same statistics. We don't need data to tell us things are screwed up."

Solutions to the problem varied, however. Some, like Ricardo Moncrief, agreed with Migden that Marin schools should offer vocational education as well as college preparatory classes.

"When we talk about education equity, are we always talking about sending students to college after high school?" said Moncrief, chairman of ISOJI, an advocacy group for low-income residents in Marin City. "What about on-the-job training? Can we talk about our students becoming productive citizens, rather than saying we want all of them to get into college?"

But fellow Marin City resident LaDonna Bonner said a college education was essential to those trying to make a living in a difficult economy.

"I know that not every kid has to go to college," Bonner said. "But going to college saved my life. I wouldn't be able to afford to support my three children if I hadn't gone back to school and gotten my college degree."

Bonner said she and other parents were hoping to provide better educational opportunities for their children by demanding more from those children - and from each other.

"We want to create a culture where (a grade of) B is the standard," Bonner said. "We want to increase parent participation, get more people involved in education. We have a campaign to increase the graduation rate of kids out of high school. And we want to increase the rate of students going into college, as well as pursuing a vocational career path."

The discussion came during Monday's celebration of King's career and the achievements of Marin City residents.

Neighborhood leaders touted the opening in November of the Marin City Health and Wellness Clinic. The clinic has served 92 clients since it opened, said Terrie Harris-Green, a member of the Marin City Community Services District board.

Harris-Green told the story of a woman from San Rafael's Canal area who came to Marin City in search of treatment and was unable to find her way to the clinic.

"But because this is Marin City, somebody picked her up and took her to the clinic, where she was able to be treated," Harris-Green said. "And wouldn't you know it, that girl is doing just fine today."

Volunteers planted medicinal herbs next to the clinic during Monday's event. The volunteers, who included about 20 members of AmeriCorps and 12 staff members of AngelPoints, a Sausalito software company, also painted picnic tables and worked to clean up the community center grounds at the direction of the Marin Conservation Corps.

Monday's event also included a gospel performance by D'George Hines and the Women Helping All People Choir, as well as art and community service awards presented by the Marin City Network and community leadership awards offered by the Grassroots Leadership Network.

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