

Community Acting Now 1252 Shaffer Avenue Roselle, NJ 07203

February 18, 2010

Dear Panelist,

We are so pleased to have your participation in this very important venue on Saturday, February 27, 2010.

This <u>Speakers Orientation Package</u> has been created to help you prepare for the upcoming Educational Panel which you so graciously agreed to participate in. We hope that it will give you a sense of the logistics and flow for the event.

We are very excited about your participation in this Black History Program. We believe that each of us has the opportunity to make history each day. Your personal biographies reflect the rich history that you are creating every day. We are honored to have you as a panelist and thank you for helping us make history through our 1<sup>st</sup> Educational Panel, led by our own, Andre Hollis.

Should anything occur impacting your ability to participate, please let us know. In the meantime, we will reach out to you to make sure you have received this information, have had an opportunity to review these materials and to address any questions you might have.

Thank you,

BT Mathis c: 908-590-6100

Diane (di) Mathis c: 908-397-4523

communityactingnow.com

#### THIS ORIENTATION PACKAGE INCLUDES:

ABOUT COMMUNITY ACTING NOW
PURPOSE OF EDUCATIONAL PANEL
THINGS PANELISTS NEED TO DO
OUTLINE PROGRAM LOGISTICS
MENU OF POTENTIAL QUESTIONS
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PRESS RELEASE

### **ABOUT COMMUNITY ACTING NOW (CAN)**

The mission for Community Acting Now is Act Now! Do Good! Be the Difference! It is a grass roots organization representing the world-wide community focused on raising culture consciousness, continuous education and development and social responsibility. We are interesting in actively collaborating with community around the world and anyone can join. For more information visit: www.communityactingnow.com.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE EDUCATION PANEL

Community Acting Now (CAN) is an organization focused on raising the cultural consciousness of our people. Our theme "Kasserian Ingera" means and how are the children? This Educational Panel discussion was planned to give the community an opportunity to participate in the discussion of both challenges and solutions as a means of driving more personal engagement and accountability in the effective education of our children. Further, to highlight areas of opportunity and best practices as sources of collaboration between schools, parents and the community.

CAN knows that Black History is every day. As part of our Black History focus, we've outlined a series of community forums/panels that will be held during 2010. This educational panel is the first in that series.

- 1. "Kasserian Ingera" and How are the Children? Education at the Crossroads
- 2. The Nation of Islam, Past and Present, Contributions to Black History and Responsibility to our Community. Scheduled: Saturday, April 17, 2010
- 3. The Black Church, Past and Present, Contributions to Black History and Responsibility to our Community. Scheduled: TBD

#### **PANELISTS NEED TO**

- A) **INVITE EVERYONE YOU KNOW:** We have widely marketed this event and expect good participation. The facility holds 500 and all of your guests are welcome. If you need any seats reserved, please let us know. Your guests will need to be on time.
- B) **INVITE STUDENTS**: We will have available a **Certificate of Participation** reflection 2.5 hours of community service because we are encouraging their attendance and participation.
- C) **ARRIVE BY 11:00 AM** LOCATION: CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL AUDITORIUM, 246 18TH AVENUE, NEWARK, NJ. If you run into any availability problem at any point, please call Diane Mathis c: 908-397-4523 or BT Mathis c: 908-590-6100.
- D) **WEAR CASUAL ATTIRE:** (since this is a community event we want to demonstrate the visualization that everyone can take a leadership role in the educational improvement process.
- E) **COMMIT AND STAY FOR ENTIRE EVENT** We want to demonstrate our children are the priority. Accordingly, 2.5 hours on a Saturday is doable for the business person (such as our panelists).
- F) **REVIEW MENU OF QUESTIONS**: You have been asked to participate as a panelist because you have already demonstrated the skills, enthusiasm, caring, experience and passion for our youth. This is not a test so your genuine and unscripted responses from the heart are what we are seeking. We just wanted to give you an idea of the type of questions that have surfaced and may be used. We do not intend on getting to all of the questions.
- G) **REVIEW YOUR BIO:** If it has changed, please get us your new version by Tuesday, 2/23.
- H) **GET TO KNOW THE OTHER PANELISTS**: A benefit of arriving early is so that you have time to meet the other Panelists and CAN Leaders. The biographies are included to help you too.

# **OUTLINE OF PROGRAM LOGISTICS**

## (Total program duration: 150 minutes)

ROLES	PROGRAM FLOW	TIME LIMIT
Student	Meaning of Kasserian Ingera	3 minutes
CAN Leader	About Community Acting Now	5 minutes
CAN Leader	Introduction of Moderator	2 minutes
Moderator	Overview of Program and Introduction of Panelists	7 minutes
Panelists	Opening remarks by Panelists (3 minutes each)	18 minutes
Moderator & Panelists	Kick off question and answer with Panelists (Questions from Menus)	60 minutes
Moderator & Panelists	Pose audience questions to Panelists (from collected index cards)	35 minutes
Panelists	Closing remarks, best practices, etc. (1 minute each)	6 minutes
Moderator	Wrap up panelists portion, tells audience where to get info/notes.	5 minutes
CAN Leader	Close out program: Coming Events - Act Now! Do Good! Be the Difference!	5 minutes
	TOTAL TIME	146 minute

#### **MENU OF POTENTIAL QUESTIONS**

During preparation for this educational panel, CAN members identified a list of potential questions to help the Moderator/Panelists field relevant questions to the community. This is just a list of the questions that has been developed for that purpose.

Additionally, at the appropriate time in the program, the Moderator will begin to field questions from the audience that may have arisen, during the program.

- 1. What is the number one issue facing Education today and what can one do about it?
- 2. How can parents and the community play an integral part in the schools? Laws around Title 1 and the districts responsibility to have parent input in major decisions.
- 3. What educational devices are holding our schools back and what can we do to rid them out of our community schools?
- 4. What has been your experience with politics and its role in education?
- 5. What successes have you made in your school *(or program)* and how can we duplicate those that have been successful?
- 6. Are you aware of alternative disciplinary methods for students versus out of school suspension?
- 7. What are some of the success stories about parent involvement in the school system?
- 8. Does the public school system work for our children? Why do our children drop out of the school system and in particular black male students?
- 9. Understanding the history of not wanting AA to be educated prior to slavery, do you think that this contributes to the reason why our kids may not do well in school?
- 10. What is the impact of teachers tenure versus performance on the quality of education?
- 11. Do you feel the system is doing what it can to inspiring the kids to learn?
- 12. Are Alternative schools the answer for minority children?
- 13. Do you feel that students should be taught more about their responsibility toward their culture or ethnicity, would they be better students? Do you feel we challenge them enough in that regard?
- 14. How are we supposed to address the situation in our schools if we don't talk about the situation in our community? Example: Cradle to Prison, self hatred, disrespect for women
- 15. In what ways can the community participate more in the education of our children?

- 16. Many people who have already raised children or who don't have any don't see that they have a role or a responsibility for educating our children. What reasons would you give a person with no children for caring or participating in the education of our children? In what ways can they participate?
- 17. What are the best programs that you have created or been part of that you feel are making a significant difference in education?
- 18.Are you familiar with Rites of Passage or Youth Programs that have added tremendous educational value and what are their predominate characteristics?
- 19.If a person in the community wants to become involved in the school system, how do they get started?
- 20.Can an increased school budget alone fix the current problems in the educational system today? If not, what else do you feel is needed?
- 21. What extraordinary acts can be taken to increase the focus of our most endangered students?
- 22. Many children are making there way through crime ridden neighborhoods or circumstances to try and get an education. What else could be done by the police, politicians or community to help these children?
- 23. Some parents struggle with challenges that impact their children. What can be done to address and support these parents?
- 24. With the perspective of a student but the power of a Principal, are there any changes that you would make to your school or program?
- 25. What is the #1 issue impacting our children in school today.
- 26. What characteristics do people look for in hiring teachers?

#### **ABOUT THE SPEAKERS**

Andre Hollis, Principal, New Horizons Community Charter School, Newark, NJ Ras Baraka, Principal, Central High School, Newark, NJ George Jones, Student, Central High School, Newark, NJ BJ BrownJohnson, Principal, Clinton K-8 Center, Plainfield, NJ Stan Neron, Director, Youth Services, Elizabeth, NJ Mary Bennett, Executive Director, Project GRAD, Newark, NJ Rupert Thomas, Honor Student, Abraham Clark High School, Roselle, NJ

#### **MODERATOR**

**Andre Hollis** was born and raised in Newark, NJ. He is a graduate of Vailsburg High School and Rutgers University. While as a student at Rutgers Andre joined and became a leader in the 100 Black Men of Rutgers University. It was in this organization where he began to garner the passion for organizing ordinary folks for a better way of life. In was in the community of New Brunswick where he began to spend time volunteering with the youth in their afterschool programs and also inviting youth in the community to day long activities on the Rutgers University campus.

Upon graduation Andre became very active and joined Black Nia FORCE. An organization whose purpose was to engage itself in freedom of racial and cultural enlightenment. Black Nia FORCE provided free tutorial services for youth in the community, organized food and clothing drives as well as health screenings throughout Newark area. They participated in using politics to further the advancement of those who were disenfranchised, disgusted and removed from the having any real power to affect the daily lives of ordinary men and women in Newark.

Andre became a teacher in the Plainfield Public schools system for 10 years and later studied at Harvard University after getting his Masters Degree from Cambridge College in Cambridge, Mass.,

Eventually he came back home to Newark where he later became Principal of New Horizons Community Charter School where he now leads a faculty of over 60 and 500 students. He believes that in the saying that "it's your attitude, not aptitude determines your altitude."

#### **PANELISTS:**

**Ras Baraka** has been called "one of the most consistent, courageous, and insightful activists of his generation." The son of revered poet-activists Amina and Imamu Amiri Baraka, Ras inherited their proud tradition of artistic excellence and community activism. A native of Newark, New Jersey and from a family who has lived in that city for over 70 years, his entire life's work is a commitment to the empowerment of people.

While a Student at Howard University, Ras (sounds like 'jazz') formed Black Nia F.O.R.C.E. (Freedom Organization for Racial and Cultural Enlightenment) - a student youth at the forefront of campus political and social activism. Through the organization, Ras helped organize and participated in food/clothing drives, neighborhood street clean-ups, and tutorials. During his summer breaks, Ras served as Assistant Youth Coordinator for the Commission for Racial Justice. With Sister Souljah and Benjamin Chavis, he helped organize camps for children on welfare.

He also traveled with G.E.T. B.U.S.Y. - a tour of rappers and political activists who lectured at jails and schools around the country. In his junior year at Howard, Ras successfully led the 1989 historic student protest to remove Lee Atwater, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, from the University's Board of Trustees. The students challenged the school to support a number of key issues including improved student housing and a graduate program in African/African American studies. The following year, Ras was elected as Vice President of the Howard University Student Government. In 1991, he graduated from the university with a degree in political science and history.

Currently, Ras is the Principal at Central High School in Newark. He formerly taught elementary school for ten years and coached girl's basketball. Baraka's love for teaching and education is matched only by his passion for political equality. Baraka ran for Newark's Mayoral position in 1994, garnering nine percent of the vote - a significant task for the then 24 year old. In 1998, he ran for Newark Councilman-at-Large and won the general election, but missed in the run off election. In 2002, once again he ran for Councilman-at-Large impressively marshaling over 13,000 votes but again missing in the run-off. His political leverage did not go unnoticed. On September 27, 2002, Ras was sworn in to serve as Deputy Mayor for Newark Mayor, The Honorable Sharpe James until October 31, 2005. On, November 2, Ras was voted by Newark's Municipal Council to serve out the remaining Councilman-at-large seat vacated by the death of Councilman Donald K. Tucker.

One issue that Ras is passionate about is Gang Intervention and Prevention. He served as one of the key organizers and mediators of the Newark Cease Fire/Peace Initiative that took place on May 21, 2004. Ras Baraka was a founding member and served as the Chairman for the Historic 1st National Hip-Hop Political Convention held in Newark, NJ in June 2004. Having traveled the world lecturing at conferences, appearing in countless documentaries, performing and organizing poetry shows, organizing in Newark's communities, one wonders how this generation's closet example of Paul Robeson finds time to accomplish what he has. For Baraka politics is art, its education, and his life's work represents a principle and passion that is rare among us.

**Mary Bennett** is a product of the Newark Public Schools; she graduated from Fifteenth Avenue Elementary School and West Side High School. She received her bachelor's degree in English/Language Arts from Douglass College and her masters degree from Rutgers University's Graduate School of education. She is licensed as a teacher, supervisor, principal, superintendent and business administrator by the NJ Department of Education. She was an English teacher at Barringer HS, an assistant principal at West Side and Malcolm X Shabazz and principal of Malcolm X Shabazz HS for ten years before she retired. After retiring she served as the lead facilitator for two US Department of Education programs, one national (GEAR UP) and one international (iNdlouvu Partnership for Lifelong Learning) in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. In 2001, she became the Executive Director of Project GRAD Newark which has served more than 18,000 students emphasizing the importance of education, and has awarded 695 scholarships to graduates of Central and Malcolm X Shabazz high schools to help them pay for a college education.

My name is **Rupert Thomas Jr.**, and I presently reside in Roselle, NJ; where I attend the local high school, Abraham Clark High School. A short term goal of mine is to gain acceptance into a four-year college/university to study pre-medicine; being as my future aspirations revolve around becoming a neurosurgeon, in hopes of one day opening up my own private practice.

Some extracurricular activities I'm involved in at the high school include: indoor and outdoor track & Field, serving as president of both the National Honor Society and Sociedad Honoria Hispanica, and Vice President of our school's Green Club. I'm also the writer/editor of our school newspaper, and a member of the yearbook staff, and Christian Fellowship Club. I also serve as a proud mentor and tutor in 3 auxiliaries: Breakfast Club, I.S.I (Iron Sharpens Iron), and I.M.A.G.E (Improving male attitudes through guidance and education). In my spare time I also tutor an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, about twice a week in math and science.

I also find time to donate back to the community through serving in church ministries and volunteering at functions such as: Caring and Sharing (a ministry geared to feeding and ministering to the homeless and less fortunate), Junior Usher Board, Boys 2 Men, C.L.I.M.B (Christ lives in my body) youth group, Youth Bible Study, Youth Department, Sunday School Department, Fitness Training Ministry, Tape & Sound Ministry and Teen Planning Committee (co-chair person). Some of my volunteer/community service activities include: volunteering as a counselor at M.O.C.A (making opportunities for children to achieve) summer/after school program, serving as an escort at our school's Inter-generational day, Family Gathering Night Tour Guide, reader at Washington Elementary School's Reading for Literacy Night, WellPoint Community Service Day volunteer, completing clinical rotations at various health care facilities, and serving as an American Red Cross Blood Drive volunteer.

I've also received numerous awards and honor(s) some of which being: a Distinguished Honor for four semesters, National Honor Roll recipient, United States Achievement Academy recipient for leadership & Service and National Science Merit Award, being an attendee of a Lead America Leadership Conference for Medicine & Healthcare at Georgetown University and People to People Student Ambassador Program nominee.

Lastly some of my working experience includes working as a counselor at M.O.C.A summer program this past summer, working as a cashier at my neighborhood Shoprite, and as a tutor.

**BJ BrownJohnson** currently serves the students, staff, families and community at Clinton K-8 Center for the Plainfield Board of Education as Principal. Since 1989 BJ started her career in education providing childcare services for infants and toddlers. During her educational journey over the past 21 years, she has served the Plainfield community as an Elementary Teacher, Technology Coordinator, Vice Principal and Principal.

In her current assignment, BJ's instructional leadership focuses on the use of collaborative professional learning communities and distributive leadership. Her leadership style fosters increased professional dialogue among certified staff and motivates interested faculty members to willing serve in leadership roles, within the framework of school operations. Working closely with the School Leadership Team to increase the rigor of instruction in the classroom and enhancing student engagement, BJ strongly promotes the use of technology as a tool to enhance the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning experiences all students, resulting in increased student achievement. During the first year of her leadership, in 2008-2009, Clinton K-8 Center demonstrated improvement gains and achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in literacy and mathematics.

Increasing parent involvement has been a heavy focus during BJ's second year of administration at Clinton. Increasing parents' direct involvement in school-based activities and direct communications with school personnel are two strategies used to support this focus. As a result, a new slate of PTO Executive Officers have committed to the students and families of Clinton K-8 Center. An increased number of family and community activities are held on a monthly basis and participation is on the rise.

Principal BJ views her role as an educator as a divine, God-given assignment. In the very beginning of teaching career, she has always referred to assignment as "her ministry." Making a difference in the lives of students and families is what BJ identifies as her mission and her vision is to contribute to accelerating the learning for students performing below grade level and enhancing the learning experiences of students who are performing at or above grade level. BJ understands that this mission and vision is not the work of one and will take unconditional commitment and sacrifice of many, however it begins with her demonstrating selfless, unconditional love in serving others.

**Stan Neron** affectionately know to many as "Brother Stan", has been a youth advocate and public servant of The City of Elizabeth for 20 years. He is an Elizabeth High School graduate and well known throughout the community.

Currently, Stan serves as the supervisor for The City of Elizabeth Office of Youth Services. In this position, he manages several neighborhood community centers and family strengthening programs. He also serves as a point person for youth and family service initiatives. He has a deep passion for empowering young people and has had success in mentoring youth (ages 6-25) through the city's Safe Haven, Building Future Leaders, and S.O.A.R. (Special Opportunity for Achievement Reawakening) programs, which he administers.

The Universal Peace Federation has honored Stan as an Ambassador for Peace for his work in the community. He is an NAACP Image Award nominee (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ) and lectures throughout the country on youth leadership and development. He has also worked with the Urban School service Corp a division of AmeriCorps while attending college and served as the Co-Advisor for the NAACP Youth.

Stan serves as an active board member of the Greater Elizabeth Adolescent Partnership, Elizabeth Municipal Alliance and Prevention Links Inc. He is also a dedicated member of The Morning Star Community Christian Center where he serves as a chair of the Men's ministry.

#### PLACEHOLDER FOR INFORMATION FOR GEORGE JONES

# Kasserian ingera - And how are the children?

Among the most accomplished and fabled tribes of Africa, no tribe was considered to have warriors more fearsome or more intelligent than the mighty Masai. It is perhaps surprising then to learn the traditional greeting that passed between Masai warriors. "Kasserian ingera" one would always say to another. It means "and how are the children?"

It is still the traditional greeting among the Masai, acknowledging the high value that the Masai always place on their children's well-being. Even warriors with no children of their own would always give the traditional answer, "all the children are well." Meaning, of course, that peace and safety prevail, that the priorities of protecting the young, the powerless, are in place, that Masai society has not forgotten its reasons for being, its proper functions and responsibilities. "All the children are well" means that life is good. It means that the daily struggles of existence do not preclude proper caring for their young.

I wonder how it might affect our consciousness of our own children's welfare if in our culture we took to greeting each other with this daily question: "and how are the children?" I wonder if we heard that question and passed it along to each other a dozen times a day, if it would begin to make a difference in the reality of how children are thought of or cared for in our own country?

I wonder if we could truly say without any hesitation, "the children are well, yes, all the children are well.

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Panel Discussion at Central High School to Address the Education of our Youth Education at the Crossroads -- A distinguished panel of experts will discuss many concerns during "Kasserian Ingera" and How are the Children?

*Roselle, NJ* – On Saturday, February 27<sup>,</sup> 2010, 12:30pm at Central High School Auditorium in Newark, NJ. Community Acting Now ("C.A.N.") a community organization will sponsor a panel discussion. A good education is essential to having a prosperous and full life. How do we make sure our children have that opportunity? This panel will engage educators, students, parents and the community on relevant educational challenges and solutions that affect the education of our children.

How is the education system preparing our children? Is there a better way to plan for the what-ifs of tomorrow? What role can the community play in education? How do we inspire our at risk youth? What happens after graduation? The barriers that low-income students face are significant. A distinguished panel of experts will discuss these questions and outline associated strategies. "Kasserian Ingera" which means and How are the Children? The panelists will also take a look at what is needed for regional and community strategies to help students, teachers, families and schools make college access a reality.

The panel presentation will be led by Andre Hollis, Principal of New Horizon Community Charter School. Panelists will include Ras Baraka, Principal, BJ Brown Johnson, Principal, Stan Neron, Youth Services Director, Mary Bennett, Executive Director, Project GRAD, as well as two students Rupert Thomas, Abraham Clark HS, Roselle, NJ and George Jones, Central HS, Newark, NJ. They will discuss educational challenges and solutions and take questions from the audience.

This is a great opportunity to learn more about our role as a community in fostering the education and growth of our children. Guests are encouraged to ask questions throughout the panel discussion. It is free and open to the public.

C.A.N. uses forums such as these to research and promote the sharing of information and ideas on issues and especially solutions that can impact our community. This particular forum promises to be very compelling, timely, and valuable given the current educational challenges.

For more information please call 908-298-8225 or visit www.communityactingnow.com.

#### About Community Acting Now ("CAN")

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