

Mayor Annise D. Parker
City of Houston
P.O. Box 1562
Houston, TX 77251

February 4, 2010

Re: An open letter to Mayor Annise Parker

Dear Mayor Parker,

On January 5, 2010 Mr. Lenwood Johnson and I met with Helena Stokes, the administrative manager at the African American Library at Gregory School (AALG). We offered our volunteer services including grant writing and advising on community involvement. Ms. Stokes not only denied to utilize our expertise in African American history and community organizing, she also denied community groups access to the library facilities.

We suggested that the AALG offer some after school programs which are particularly needed by the residents in the immediate vicinity of the library. There is a lot of drug dealing in our Freedmen's Town neighborhood that children must walk by on their way home from school everyday. Our children need structured, regularly scheduled adult supervised programs to save them from the streets. In fact I will volunteer to teach an after school class two days a week.

One month has passed since our meeting with Ms. Stokes, yet she refuses to even bother to answer our followup correspondence.

As you may know, the AALG has an annual payroll of \$437,405. In addition the AALG is also budgeted to spend \$18,000 on unqualified consultants. The AALG is supposed to be an archive of African American history, yet it only holds less than 10 linear feet of collections and does not even have any historical black periodicals or even subscriptions to the current African American newspapers. Ms. Stokes and the entire Houston Public Library system does not have one grant in process to purchase African American collections, nor have they ever written one grant to build their non-existent collection.

Affirmative action programs need to be installed in the AALG in order to address the community's needs. The AAGL sits unused because the community's requests, the city's own consultants and the city Housing and Community Development's plans for the Gregory School building were ignored.

In these days of budget deficits the Houston taxpayers should not be expected to pay nine (9) library staff to sit around with nothing to do when

they in fact could and should be serving the community. What is even more shocking is that not one employee of the African American Library at Gregory even has a credential in African American history or studies.

We respectfully request that one of AAGL's three empty classrooms be immediately reprogrammed into a computer lab with one staffer assigned to assist patrons with job searches and homework. Furthermore, we request that the community be granted access to the facility so that we provide volunteer after school programs. Finally, we request that the excessive security forces in AALG be reduced to a normal amount.

Sincerely,

Timothy O'Brien, Ph.D
On behalf of Gregory Library Watch