

Thompson to chamber: school district open for business

by Sonya M. Toler 6/20/01
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The Pittsburgh Public School District is open for business.

That was the message Superintendent John W. Thompson had for members of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Western Pennsylvania.

Thompson was the guest speaker during a June 15 "Power Breakfast" at the Rivers Club in Oxford Center, Downtown.

The chamber regularly holds these morning sessions so its members can network with one another and meet decision-makers that can help them improve their business.

Thompson, the city's first permanent Black superintendent, has been attacked for making some tough decisions in order to balance the district's budget. The most controversial changes include closing schools and raising property taxes.

Despite the outright attacks by some school board directors and members of the public, Thompson remains optimistic about what is about to occur to improve education for children.

A new school will be built in Homewood, a world-class performing arts school will be constructed Downtown and the district will invest in technology to improve the delivery of education, among other things.

"There will be between \$160,000 and \$170,000 in construction alone in the next two to three years," he said.

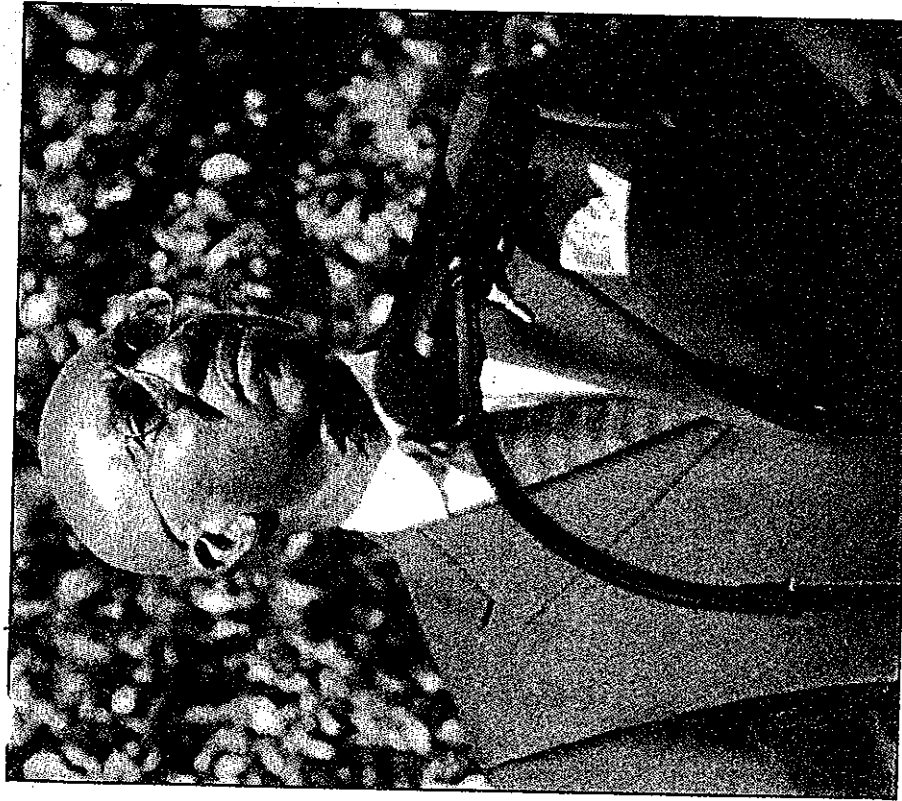


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JOHN W. THOMPSON

Although he wants to do business with legitimate Black-owned business, Thompson said don't expect him to cut corners and warned:

"When you come to the table, have a big appetite...and collaborate together as a team and present a package.

"Tell me what you're going to do to provide a better education for children and you'll have my ear," he said. "These 43,000 kids in Pittsburgh control the future of this region.

A tradition during these chamber breakfasts is a question and answer period after the guest speaker is through.

People praised Thompson for the accomplishments he has made so far despite the agenda of some school board members who have publicly stated their intention to run him out of town.

Someone asked if the district would list its request for proposals on its web site. Thompson said yes.

Someone else wanted clarification on the performance arts school. The superintendent explained the district has partnered with Point Park College so the high school's students can take college courses for credit.

He also shared his vision for relocating the district's vocational program to a newly built but vacant building on the North Side originally meant as a research laboratory for Allegheny General Hospital before financial troubles caused the hospital to forego those plans.