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# UR grad Nicole McCawthan knows how to help city schools

MARK HARE • JUNE 27, 2010

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The question isn't whether the mayor or school board should control the city schools, but whether this community and this basket-case state government of ours will ever commit to policies that will improve the [performance](#) and life chances of the poorest urban children.

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Everyone plays a role in the catastrophic failure of urban schools, but there is a way out.

Nicole "Nykki" McCawthan is proof of that. A decade ago, as she was about to enter the city's John Marshall High School, she was recruited to the Upward Bound program that gives low-income students whose [parents](#) did not attend college the tools to achieve academic success and, more important, the belief that success is theirs for the taking.

"When I was growing up," she says, "no one ever used the 'C-word.'" College was not in the cards. Upward Bound changed that. A federally funded program, Upward Bound provides eligible students with extensive tutoring and Saturday classes in math, literature, science, writing and foreign language. Upward Bound tutors help students search for colleges and [financial](#) aid, and provide college visits to give them a taste of the life to come.

The program surrounds kids who can barely imagine life beyond Avenue D or Jefferson Avenue with a world of possibilities. They learn how to study, to believe in themselves, to step outside their comfort zones.

## Mark Hare

Mark has been a local columnist for the *Democrat and Chronicle* since 1997. Before that, he was editorial page editor for the afternoon *Times-Union*, and before that deputy editorial page editor for the *Democrat and Chronicle*. He began his career there as a reporter in 1984. He is a native of Owego, Tioga County. He is a graduate of St. John Fisher College and the State University at Brockport. He was a high school teacher for six years before switching to journalism.



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Last month, Nykki McCawthan, 25, graduated from the University of Rochester with a [master's degree](#) in school counseling. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from the State University College at Buffalo, where she went after two years at Monroe Community College, which houses and directs the Upward Bound program in Rochester. She is currently a residence director at SUNY Geneseo. She is

determined to become a high school principal.

She did her master's thesis on the importance of a school climate that promotes success. She says she took the Geneseo job to acquire some administrative experience, organizing and motivating staff and 200 students.



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