

LOCAL/STATE

Marva Collins, nationally known educator, dies at 78

Staff and wire reports

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Hilton Head Island resident Marva Collins, a former substitute teacher whose success in educating poor black students at a private school she founded made her a candidate for U.S. secretary of education and the subject of a television movie, died June 24 at age 78, according to The New York Times.

Collins gained fame in the late 1970s, when national publications and "60 Minutes" started reporting on her use of a rigorous curriculum to turn children once labeled "problem learners"

into superior scholars.

She taught in Chicago public schools for 14 years before getting fed up with what she considered sub-par education standards. In 1975, she opened Westside Preparatory School in Chicago, with \$5,000



Collins

of her pension money, in her home. Collins said she refused government funding because she wanted to exceed, not adhere to, public-school benchmarks.

Her philosophy was that all

children are excellent. Teachers therefore need to expect and accept nothing less than their students' best work. Average effort is not an option.

Her teaching tactics won many fans. The Clark College graduate received more than 40 honorary doctorates, including ones from Notre Dame and Dartmouth, for raising expectations in American education. She won the 1981 Jefferson Award for "Greatest Public Service Benefiting the Disadvantaged," a recognition bestowed in other years on Betty Ford and Bill and Melinda Gates. President Bush awarded Collins

the National Humanities Medal in 2004.

According to the National Endowment for the Humanities, she was considered for the secretary of education post in the Reagan administration but declined in order to continue her work in Chicago. After turning over the school's reins to her daughter Cynthia, Collins spent her time presenting seminars to teachers and corporate executives around the country. Westside Prep closed in 2008.

Prince, the musician, gave her a \$300,000 donation to train teachers in her methodology.

She appeared in one of his music videos.

"I want to be able to say I got an A-plus on the assignment God gave me," Collins told The Island Packet in 2007.

"The Marva Collins Story" was a 1981 television movie on CBS with Cicely Tyson playing Collins and Morgan Freeman as her husband.

According to The New York Times, Marva Delores Knight was born in Monroeville, Ala., on Aug. 31, 1936. Her father, Henry, was a merchant, cattleman and undertaker. Her mother was the former Bessie Nettles.

Raised in Atmore, near Mobile, in the segregated South, she graduated from Clark College in Atlanta, now Clark Atlanta University, and taught in Alabama schools before moving to Chicago. There she worked as a medical secretary before becoming a substitute teacher.

She married Clarence Collins who died in 1995. They had three children, two of whom, Eric and Patrick, survive her, as does her mother, Bessie Mae Johnson; a sister, Cynthia Sutton; and her second husband, George R. Franklin, according to The New York Times.