

**Partners for a Prosperous Athens
Education Subcommittee Meeting
April 24, 2006
Cedar Shoals High School**

Vivian Fisher, Partners for a Prosperous Athens (“PPA”) steering committee member and chair of the Education Subcommittee, welcomed approximately 100 citizen members of the Education Subcommittee and shared some education statistics prepared by the PPA Data Subcommittee. The statistics are available on the PPA website, www.prosperousathens.org, and participants were invited to e-mail either Vivian (vhfisher@uga.edu) or Courtney Tobin (ctobin@fanning.uga.edu), one of the facilitators, with any data-related questions. Much of the data discussed may also be found at <http://reportcard2005.gaosa.org>.

The Education Subcommittee then divided into nine groups of approximately 11 people each to discuss the following questions:

- a. Why did you choose the Education Subcommittee?
- b. What are your aspirations for this project?
- c. How can this group be most effective?
- d. What does success look like for this subcommittee? For Partners for a Prosperous Athens?
- e. What are your hopes for the role education can play in making Athens more prosperous and in supporting our children and youth?
- f. What are the questions that aren’t being asked that should be asked?

After approximately 50 minutes, the full group reconvened, and each small group was asked to highlight several critical points that arose during that group’s discussion. The notes below summarize the full group discussion, and the notes from the individual small group sessions (which were each facilitated) follow:

The first small group focused on ‘the missing voice’ and reminded people to keep asking how we include the voices that are not here. The group believed a recognition that (1) education is not just what happens in the schools, and (2) that the schools are not the sole owners of education in this community would be success. They also discussed the need to be honest and trust each other to take risks, and to talk about things that are sensitive and hard to discuss – do what is best for the overall good.

Another small group said this is not a feel good exercise – this is about solving problems. How can we help families support their kids? Students need to be involved, we need to understand the importance of mentoring, and we need to pay attention to gender as an issue. There is an existing model for a successful system in our own community – the Performance Learning Center. This group also discussed the need to create an equitable environment and deal with the inherent despair of some students.

The next group discussed the importance of starting ‘from the bottom up’, recognizing that kids are dealing with very different home situations. Some students are already ‘trapped’ by the third grade, and we cannot leave children behind who have already fallen behind. The group noted that mentoring programs can be helpful, but that there is a disconnect between one of the top universities in the country and a school system that has significant challenges.

Another small group discussed the importance of partnerships, including business, UGA, parents, and social organizations. Businesses employ high school kids – it would be great if they could also show an interest in them in school. The group talked about supporting parents and focusing on the home environment, and the importance of talking to ALL kids, not just ‘successful’ kids.

The next small group believed success would be a child with a high school degree who is ready for the next phase of his/her life and has a sense of purpose – a young adult who can get a job. That group also said the subcommittee needs more information in the areas of race, conflict, etc. They noted the lack of diversity on the subcommittee and would like to include more of those who need help. They particularly want to hear from those who were in poverty and got out, and they want to help kids not only dream of getting out of poverty, but help them get out. They believe this needs to be more of a community discussion in addition to a two-way discussion; we need to look at those in poverty and learn from them.

Another small group noted that the education of adults in this community hasn’t really been discussed – how do we address this issue? Additional training, GED, job training – how do we make education accessible to the adults in our community? They also asked whether we can create the political will to do what needs to be done. This is greater than any one program or issue. Can we create the political will to address the racism and classism that some of us believe exists?

The next group talked about recognizing and building on the excellence shown in some of our schools. They also noted the need to broaden the discussion beyond the typical K-12 discussion, and the importance of educating educators and others involved in the education of our students. We need to talk to them about poverty and racial issues in community. Education is the root of all things that can be improved in our community, and we should be coordinating all community resources, not just service providers. This includes communication within schools and between schools; currently, not all schools are sharing and learning from successes. We must find models that work and use them across our schools consistently. We can learn from other communities, and we don’t necessarily need to ‘reinvent the wheel.’ The group also discussed the importance of challenging the traditional model of education – can we meet federal and state standards while offering a creative, community-based system of education? Some in this group believed there are too many guidelines in the current system. We want to ensure that we’re meeting the needs of our customers – the students. We must reach out to students and ask them what they need, what’s working and what isn’t. We also need to recognize

that some students don't have someone to speak for them. Being creative includes considering alternate ways of teaching – we can't be so rigid.

Another small group discussed the importance of getting the community involved in our classrooms – we have a lot of resources in the community that could make things come alive for kids in the classroom. We cannot make excuses any longer; we need to be honest with ourselves about the improvements that need to be made. Education is the key to making Athens more prosperous and eliminating poverty. We need to reach out and hear other voices so we can understand and educate ourselves. We're here to talk for those who don't have voices.

The final group said it is critical that this project not just be one that 'collects dust'. PPA can be unique - we hope this it will be family-centered and education is viewed as education of the whole family, where families support the schools. We also hope that PPA can reduce the digital divide – many in our community cannot access the website, notes from the meetings, etc. We should take this as an opportunity to educate ourselves - Not just going into communities, but also into the work places to talk to employees. Others in the room asked why there so many good programs and so much energy spent without seeing results - what is the disconnect?

Vivian then asked subcommittee members for ideas on how we should work together as a subcommittee. There were 170 people who signed up for the Education Subcommittee at the March 27 kick-off meeting, not including people who joined and signed up this evening. The following suggestions and ideas were mentioned by citizen subcommittee members:

- We like working in smaller groups.
- We need to move from Cedar Shoals into neighborhoods to hear voices that are not now being heard.
- We should allow subgroups of the Education Subcommittee to take specific topics – people can find their passion with a lot of interconnection.
- Smaller groups should be allowed to meet more often than once a month if they want – this way, we can get information from these small groups to the facilitators for the full group to digest before the next meeting.

Vivian then discussed an upcoming (May 3) meeting she has with Clarke County School District principals to ask them for permission to come talk to teachers and principals prior to the end of the school year May 19. If the principals agree, we will need volunteers from this group to help reach all 19 schools before May 19.

Vivian also discussed moving into community and having at least one meeting in each of the school district's four (4) quadrants to hear from parents. She asked for input on how we get to the people we're trying to reach. Suggestions included:

- Go into other places where people function daily – not just schools, but other places that they are comfortable.

- Important that we talk to students, particularly those in school who are trying their best to make it but who are not going to make it.
- Some of the target population will likely have a language barrier – ask people if they are willing to help with language, child care and transportation.

Vivian then asked for a list of groups in the community who are already working on ways to enhance high school completion and helping children be successful. The following groups were highlighted by citizen subcommittee members:

1. Athens Literacy Council
2. Collegiate Candidates – Clarke Central
3. Public Library
4. High School Completion Committee
5. Upward Bound
6. Athens Tutorial Program
7. Athens Regional
8. Mentoring program
9. Council on Aging – foster grandparent program
10. Adopt a Class
11. Multicultural Task Force
12. Partnership with School District and UGA
13. EOC
14. Faith-based organizations that work with schools to help them graduate
15. Gentlemen on the Move
16. Young Women Scholars
17. Grand Slam
18. Pinewood Library
19. Student organizations at UGA
20. Volunteer UGA
21. Drumming for Success
22. Oasis at Pinewood
23. Catholic Social Services
24. Communities in Schools

One citizen subcommittee member asked the group ‘Who is being offered a permanent job after kids finish these programs?’

Another citizen subcommittee member asked each subcommittee member to try and get to know some of the students who are trying to get out of poverty. Are we willing to offer a ride to one of these families?

Another citizen subcommittee member asked the group to look at the people who are doing the hiring – and who is not being hired.

Vivian noted that the next meeting would be at Clarke Central on May 22, 2006 from 7-9. She told subcommittee members they would all be receiving copies of the notes via e-

mail, and that we would ask for volunteers for tasks between now and the May 22 meeting by e-mail.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS – NOTES

Group One (Pink)

- Aspirations/Success
 - All students have appropriate education for work or college
 - Course-Family and Consumer Science, to manage lives post graduation
 - Students use skills to address issues of poverty—students are seen as a resource.
 - Parent involvement policy and practices that reaches all parents/families
 - High expectations for all students regardless of soc-econ.
- Give students hope that they can get an education, get a job
 - Children come to school ready to learn
 - Target population more involved in this process-why/how are we failing them
 - Each child by 3rd grade have necessary skills to succeed in school
 - Engage students in conversation and in design/development of a successful school
 - Embrace differences—not run from them
- Page Three
 - Need to understand push/pull factor that cause people to leave school? – How to counter
 - Interview dropout students what do you do after dropping out? Use existing resources—(Maxine).
 - Don't mess up what is working
 - How do we get parents of young children involved at home?
 - Where are the holes? What is missing?
 - Push kids out of school? Pull kids out?
 - Political influences→cause kids to leave school?
 - How do you build on a child's strength→get them involved→find child's interest?
 - How does racism play into the issue of pushing and pulling kids out of school?
 - Community involvement.
- Page Four
 - Every public school to be so good that parents WANT their children to attend.
 - Community acknowledge the goodness of schools
 - Adult literacy? How does education play a role?
 - Get parents INVOLVED
 - Isolated poverty—each item relates to each other.

- HOPE-Can I prosper in Athens after I graduate.
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- Need feedback from meetings
- How will we meet next?
- Each group represent a different topic with a leader and have a common link among the groups
- Integrating what is generated here and also what people in poverty want
- Bring teachers in for opinions.
- Bring someone who can give a different view on problems/What the problems are.
- Questions
 - How do racial and socio-economic factors play out in schools?
 - Teen parents and dropout? Developmentally what are their barriers to complete education, childcare? Earning above minimum wage.
 - Teach about appropriate developmental levels.

GROUP 2 (BROWN)

- Why?
 - Help
 - Encourage
 - To facilitate jobs
 - Tap into retired education(ors)
 - Foundation of community
 - Break the cycle
- Aspirations
 - Raise community awareness
 - Education is most important, job 1
 - Apply education to the REAL WORLD, how?
 - Change the college-based curriculum
 - Look at alternative style of teaching
 - Input from people in the trenches
 - Vocational Education
 - Parents and teachers collaborate to make students succeed
 - Keep students motivated to learn (teacher training?)
 - Setting benchmarks for success
 - Change with the times
- How can we be effective?
 - Raise community awareness that vocational education works
 - Raise PR to community legislators, “spread the word,” especially “positive” energy
 - Throw away excuses
 - Know there is no quick fix

- Get rid of the excuses, talk to students and staff, school community about what they think works.
- Communities (speakers, programs) in school
- Students in communities
- What does success look like?
 - Stay together in same group
 - Focus
 - Hear more positive than negative PR
- Hopes?
 - Caring, productive, proud citizens
 - Get informed of positive PR
 - Know how we are compared to.
- What Questions Should be Asked?
 - What HONESTLY works
 - Examples of what success looks like (communities similar to ours)
 - What happened? Without excuses.

GROUP 3 (ORANGE)

- A:
 - Frontline to break cycle
 - Personal input that would like realized
 - Educator 4
 - Education best way to tackle the issue
 - Future children will be educational system
- B:
 - Want to make best county in state
 - Want to better understand “poverty group”
 - Expanded opportunities for lifetime learning
 - At what point is dropping out most likely
 - Does that correlate with poverty
 - Brainstorming to tangible results
 - Results...programming in school; higher graduation rate
 - Classroom of students with hope for THEIR future.
 - Involve those with little hope for those we’re aiming to help
 - What is the blueprint for survival for those we aim to help?
- C:
 - Diversify the group [have parents, grandparents, teachers, business owners, interested community members]
 - Need students; people who moved out of poverty
 - More socio-economic diversity
 - More career development in schools
- D:

- Higher graduation rate
- Group is still working and is representative of the community at large
- Have student value education
- Education system must learn to value students
- Address the “middle class” values of the system
- Encourage the entrepreneur spirit
- E:
 - More service learning in schools
 - Hope that learning is not confined to brick and mortar of school building
 - More parent involvement including financial, etc. life skills in supplemental or/and curriculum.
 - Better writing skills; communication skills in general
 - Why are private schools doing better?
 - Tracking?
 - How do you get out of poverty?

GROUP 4 (BLUE)

Education subgroup facilitator Morrow

- Student recovery
 - Problems—boredom irrelevant; absence of family support
- Disconnects between UGA and community to create aspirations—upward bound for Athens
 - Hope scholarships—entitlement but no reciprocal obligations to community (education)
 - Mentoring—community commitment; first 3 years “adoption.” The *key in child development*. Students arrive with disadvantages.
- Class size, 3rd, 5th-8th graders, determining years—class size too large
- Connection between poverty, failure in education, success in life.
- Vocational option needs (internships, etc) to become a viable option. (Grayson Tech—Gwinnett—Model-funding). More flexibility; a balance, career and basic 3R’s.
- Mentoring—social capital in community, pairing off of mentors with mentees.
- “Adopt-a-dropout”—even possible pay stipend to drop-outs; even possible corporate sponsors. Earn credits and stipends if you finish.
- Tap outside sources to see who’s doing programs well. Ed. College as UGA Bill and Linda Gates Foundation.
- Focus from bottom up—focus on prevention, and then intervention
- Assistant teachers
- What is school system willing to change (build teacher—student relationships over time). Learning communities.
- Mentors from UGA at Classic City High School.
- OPENNESS

- Dan Hunter, Margaret E. Margaret, Louise Manders, Lori Aldridge, Natalie Bishop, J.E. McDonald, Tammye Berry, Robert Shapiro, Philip Potter, Diane Morrow, John Morrow

GROUP 5 (GREEN) J.P. Oliver

- Success
 - Importance of decision making skills—start early
 - Build confidence
 - Teach planning
 - Life skills
 - Schools don't own all of education. Education is responsibility of whole community
 - Position schools as places where children can thrive, build confidence, are safe, have self respect, believe in self
 - Educate as community learning center
 - We develop a long term effort from honest, trusting work
 - Examine school organization, hour time used, etc. → is it meeting needs, really?
- Missing Voices
 - Yes, we need to hear but do not let it stop us
 - “Fan” ourselves out
 - Focus groups at local school
 - Utilize mentoring/tutoring program
 - Parent/family involvement
 - Ways to involve
 - What does involvement really look like?
 - Go to places where voices are and bring stories back. Our committee goes to events
 - Schools to learn inputs (already planned)
 - At churches and partners registration
 - At political events
 - Social service meeting
 - Clinics/health department
 - YMCA registration
- Why Ed. Committee?
 - Familiarity
 - Parent
 - Equalizer
 - The best schools
 - Wife in CCSD
 - Education is a part of me
 - Education can stop cycle

- Education is key
- The best chance for long term impact
- Education is where you make changes
- Ditto to all above

GROUP 6 (PINK AND PURPLE)

- Why You Chose Education?
 - Public education most important
 - Children in schools
 - Curriculum concerns
 - Education has greatest impact on poverty
 - Represent children falling thru cracks (specifically African-Americans)
- Aspirations
 - NOT another project to collect dust—positive follow-thru with results
 - Improve drop out rate. Where are these children going?
 - To have best school system in state
 - All children who need mentoring have access to them (i.e. Gentlemen on the Move)
 - Help children find /identify with successful role model
 - Family centered not just focus on student. Reduce digital divide.
- Gentlemen on the Move
 - 3f: Why not getting more result for effort? (lots of programs available but not seeing result). Is it worth effort to interview those who drop out?
 - What reasons are there other than poverty that contributes to educational gap?
 - Why don't more value education? Or understand the value?
 - What happens between high school and college?
 - Define "at risk" and "value education"
 - 3c: Get into neighborhoods. Multiple demographics. Educate ourselves! (Talk to Dexter and Mike F. employees).
 - Models of successful communities (90-90-90 and others). With grain of salt.
 - How does state/local funding effect/impact property tax, Title I.
 - Compile local statistics—database names not numbers
- Aspirations: Foundation for Excellence in Schools, more support. More focus on birth→3 year olds. Everyone to believe ALL children can learn.

GROUP 7 (BLUE)

- Why Here?
 - Educator

- Children in School system
- Taught at district
- Most social problems have Ed. Demo.
- Education is source of success or failure
- Concerned with severity of educational problems and social problems of youth.
- Athens is home of UGA and school success should be better
- Interested in engaging local talent (for example, retired English professor).
- Aspirations:
 - Create a partnership school system, UGA, city Business, Industry, Social Service business, etc.
 - Many employers employ high school students. Employers should take interest in students school performance
 - More realistic High school graduation requirements for Athens High Schools.
 - Great parent involvement in children's schooling
 - Support working parents in their children's education
 - Children have positive supervision after school day
 - Children awareness of parent's plight. Go to work with Mom and Dad, etc.
 - School attractive to kids (variety) of learning methods
- This Group's Effectiveness
 - Can mentor, Can provide apprenticeships
 - Encourage businesses to play a role in children
 - Determine-ask school officials/teachers what we can do to help them
 - Jobs employment support for High School Grads
 - Talk to the kids. What support do they need?
- Success Looks like...
 - Youth involved in positive service/clubs, orgs., etc. to overcome the influence of the pop culture: drugs, sex, etc.
 - Person that graduates with certainty that they are ready for next phase of education or life (sense of wholeness and purpose).
- Questions not being asked:
 - Need more info on race and social class (poverty simulation) (conflict resolution).
 - How do current students perceive their education, schools, future aspirations (must be well done, not just by survey)
 - Talk to those that have fallen through the system
 - What is going on in the family and home and how is it impacting our children
 - How do we compare with other urban areas with similar demographics

GROUP 8 (BROWN)

- Importance of Education
 - Majority of men in prison do not have an education
 - Parenting
 - Bad reputation of schools
 - Education is the basis of PDSP community
 - Education is a prevention for societal issues
 - Structure of education is inadequate – Major changes need to happen to challenge kids in the right areas to address the 21st Century
 - Addressing the despair of kids who dropout
 - Building a useful education
 - The percentages are sad
 - Despair between UGA and CCSD
 - Quality teachers but they are overwhelmed
 - Where are the field trips
 - Need system to elevate alleviate stress on teachers
 - Deal with hopelessness of kids
 - Deal with despair
 - Schools are not preparing them for college
 - Need to have schools that are enriching and help them grow creatively
 - We are currently failing – An educated population is our elevation
 - Equitable environment

- Certificate of Attendance is not a good measure of academic achievement – is useless
 - Need skills – Graduation is given at the close of completion of meeting skills/standards
 - Why do we give certificate of Attendance?
 - Not sure if Vocational Certificate is good
 - Statistics are a problem – Quality education is needed for all

- Where are the poor? I do not want to give them something they can't use.
 - Might not know what prosperous means
 - Need more students from UGA to help
 - Use of “poor”, “poverty” does not work
 - Is there really going to be a change?
 - Community workshop – Hull house kilns – Trained to make pottery...quilts
 - Working/learning together
 - Where have we lost this...?
 - Connection between vocational school and regular school
 - New NCLB means that schools are focused on the “answers” not the process
 - Internship where education majors come into the schools
 - Why are people not here – Three jobs

- We need to talk to the students who dropped out – Talk to students who can't read or write
- Teachers, curriculum family situations – What is the problem?
- Did not graduate from high school because of Graduation Test...How are we helping?
- Graduation Test is why people are dropping out
- Summer Session Class prior to retaking Graduation Test
- PLC needs to lean more
- Expand PLC down to elementary school
- Transitional teams
- Education is imposed on us not ingrained
- How can we engage kids
- How are we getting so far without reading and writing?
- Graduation Test is a major obstacle - Board members are opposed to the test
- Why are we not learning the material before the GHSGT?
- Are we giving them what they need
- Gender is an issue – Boys are treated differently
- Kids need to get energy out
- You see that they kids have a problem but you are not helping
- Kids with problems are not identified
- Adults mentors needed for parents
- Identify a sister city and learn from them
- What can we do to involve families/parents?
- How can we get to support families to support their kids?
- Students mentor commissioners/board members
- Students work

GROUP 9 (Jim G. – facilitator)

1. There was a lot of emphasis on the fact that poor education is the root of many societal problems.
2. The idea that we wanted to look at new effective educational models was discussed.
3. We discussed focusing on special needs children, particularly kids in foster care. We also discussed the need to focus on the issues and challenges facing the parents.
4. There needs to be ongoing brainstorming of solutions—we need to be willing to ask hard questions and suggest innovative ideas.
5. Adult education was also emphasized-both for men and women.
6. We need to look at the underlying causes of poverty including drugs and violence.
7. It was emphasized that we need to look at the coordination of resources and programs so that students and their families can be served in a more collaborative and effective way.

8. It was emphasized on several occasions the importance of mentors. It was suggested that the mentoring needed to be done very responsibly to help assure continuity and not more disappointment. Churches were mentioned as a source for mentors.
9. The problem of negligence was also discussed.
10. The need to focus on young black men was emphasized.
11. We discussed the need to go into the communities with this process so that more of the people in need could participate.
12. The need to provide professional development to school staff concerning poverty issues was emphasized.
13. The need for academic professional development was also emphasized.
14. The need for career education was discussed—starting at the early elementary ages. Kids need hope.
15. The need to harness the resources of the university was discussed. Service Learning, Mentoring, and coordinated involvement and follow-up was emphasized. Short term and superficial involvement can be counter productive.

Some questions that need to be asked included:

1. How can we get rid of some/all of the federal and state mandates that inhibit schools from freedom to best serve students?
2. What are some successful non-traditional models that we may want to look at (i.e. charter schools)?
3. Whose job is it to educate the students who don't graduate?
4. How do we get parents involved? How do we motivate the community to take responsibility for educating these students who don't graduate?
5. How do we work with service providers and all community resources to maximize resources?

Some other areas that were discussed included:

1. Work with businesses where drop outs are working to try to encourage these businesses to provide continuing education to these young people.
2. Work with the Rankin Foundation to get grants for adult education.
3. Coordinate with the school system as they are doing their strategic planning process.
4. Get churches involved.

SUMMARY FOCUS:

1. Continue to understand the issues of poverty that effect education.
2. Develop strategies to learn from and coordinate with existing groups that are addressing this issue including service providers, school system, parents, churches, and other community groups. Begin developing a more collaborative strategy.
3. Begin exploring other effective educational models that have been proven to be successful both locally and nationally and internationally.
4. Be sensitive to one another as we look for new answers.

5. As we continue to understand and explore the deep issues of poverty, we remain committed to providing some concrete recommendations.