

Education Committee Summary 7/24/06

Sub-Committee - Athens Success Stories

Principal Contact - Fred Smith, JoBeth Allen

Mission: To identify people in Athens who have experienced poverty and have gone on to contribute to the community. To establish a speakers' bureau and media series to share these success stories.

Learnings: (Our learning will be from the stories people tell about what support people and systems contributed to their success.)

1. It is important for students living in poverty to have positive role models and mentors, including career mentors, internships, and apprenticeships.
2. It is important for families living in poverty to have positive role models and mentors.

Sub-Committee – Family Engagement

Principal Contacts – Ronnie Swoopes, Jim Geiser

Mission Statement: Because family and community engagement is critical to a child's success in school, our mission is to help schools, families, and community organizations develop trusting, effective relationships centered on helping children succeed.

Some Learnings that were discussed with our sub-committee included:

Priority Learnings

1. Our current system is not set up to encourage real family engagement.
 2. Maintaining stable relationships is key in maintaining strong family engagement. These relationships can be among teachers/parents/family groups/church community/business community, etc. School stability, access, and collaboration are key factors in maintaining family engagement between families and schools.
 3. Funding does not indicate that family engagement is a priority within our community—within our school system, business community, and religious community.
 4. Family engagement needs to become a habit early—at birth (or before).
 5. We need to develop new paradigms and opportunities for parents and schools to collaborate. We need to take better advantage of the opportunities when families and school staff meet.
- Parents need to take more responsibility in raising their children.
 - Schools need to understand that there is a culture gap.
 - Schools need to listen to parents.
 - Schools and communities could develop true collaborative interactions.
 - Parents are the children's first teachers.
 - We need to build up the parents.
 - The positive and negative perceptions of parents will be passed on to their children.

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- Parents need to be empowered and have say-so on their terms.
- There needs to be mentorship programs for parents and encouragement to help build up their children.
- Parents need a different level of mentoring.
- Parents need to be treated with respect.
- We need to be careful not to overwhelm teachers.
- Parents need to have ownership and buy-in.
- We need to treat parents as customers.
- Race, culture, and class play a huge role in this discussion.
- There is a lot of judging on both ends.
- There needs to be social learning.
- Teachers need to make more home visits.
- Services and schooling need to be brought to the neighborhoods where the families live.
- Schools are too big; we need to look at smaller schools.
- We need to develop schools around communities so that parents can become more engaged.
- Family engagement is contingent on positive relationships.
- School transiency breaks down family engagement.
- Junior High and High School are too impersonal. Teachers have 150-180 students.
- Schools are currently not set up to encourage family engagement.
- Family engagement is difficult.
- What percentage of kids are at high risk?
- What is the true dropout rate?
- The presence of consistent, positive male role models is critical.
- The issue of teen parents effects family engagement.
- Child care classes in schools could help teen parents stay engaged with their children, and perhaps help end the cycle.
- Don't just deal with the problem at hand, but look at the next generation.
- Consider mentoring between high school students and elementary students.
- The business community could play a major role in supporting family engagement. They could give parents time off to visit schools; they could hold trainings and workshops; hold focus groups; as well as child care.
- Religious groups could become more involved in supporting family engagement.
- Schools can broaden family engagement by incorporating parent programs like GED at schools.
- Schools should be in the neighborhoods; we do not have neighborhood schools.

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Committee/Subcommittee Continuing Education

Principal Contact: Roussalind Winston-Howell

Mission Statement for Committee/Subcommittee:

To promote and expand educational opportunities for all adults in Athens Clarke County by coordinating existing efforts and initiating new ones.

Learnings of the Group:

1. We do not know the learning needs of the adults in Clarke county.
(needs assessment)
2. GED/ESOL should be offered at times and locations that meet the needs of local residents.
3. Athens Tech needs to coordinate with GED/ESL programs to develop transitional support services.
4. Need an understanding of skills needed by local employers.
5. Training and professional development is needed to adequately train adult instructors.
6. Adequate pay for GED/ESL instructors.

Committee/Subcommittee Education/Religion

Principal Contact __Kaye Giese/ Katherine Peiper__

Mission Statement for Committee/Subcommittee:

Collaborating with the faith based community, this committee is working to take action in an effort to end poverty in Athens-Clarke County through spiritual and practical means.

Findings of the Group:

1. There is a definite separation in the faith based community (doctrine, theology, geography, race, politics)
2. Faith based communities need to take a leadership role in issues in the community. (ex. Poverty, education, crime, AIDS/health issues, financial issues)
3. There are more single parent families attending church- the church should be addressing these types of families specifically.

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4. Churches are not aware of their specific congregations (such as the knowledge of individual situations of congregates) Most specifically the education status of “in house” children.
5. Churches aren’t gathering current data about their congregation status (churches don’t know what’s going on in house). Gathering this information can help implement targeted actions.
6. Churches need to collaborate to maximize use of facilities to best benefit the community.
7. The faith based community needs to have a clear plan to address poverty in house and abroad.
8. *****Churches need to be able to know who’s doing what in the community. (ex. Have a resource book of information about all outreach programs, emergency needs shelters, etc.)

Sub-Committee – New/Effective Models

Contact – Pam Swayne

Mission Statement: Identify, research, and support successful programs in our community and in demographically similar communities that support the needs of our diverse learners.

Learnings

1. Although we have successful programs, for example, the Performance Learning Center, we’re still not meeting the needs of all students.
2. Reading is a problem that isn’t being addressed effectively.
3. One recurring issue voiced in our community is the value of Vocational/Technical education as an avenue for our students.
4. A culture of low expectations and a lack of parental involvement negatively affect student achievement.
5. Community mentors increase student achievement.
6. We need to do more to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers.

Other things we want to keep in mind.

1. Correlation between smaller class size, effective teaching, and student achievement.
2. Is there a correlation between student involvement in extra-curricular activities and graduation rates?
3. A need for programs that teach both hard and *soft* skills.

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Sub-Committee – Youth

Contact: Toni Reed

Mission Statement: Our mission is to identify barriers to school completion as well as opportunities for successful school completion for all Athens-Clarke County children.

Learnings: (Not prioritized)

1. Address the No Child Left Behind law—how it's led to an overemphasis on standardized testing rather than on learning; don't teach to the test. (Return to benchmarks.)
2. Focus on the children and *why* they're not achieving.
3. Emphasize vocational education prior to high school; identify children's interests earlier; explore possible vocations.
4. Children need mentors/caring adults/advocates/leadership/guidance/roll models; all children need at least one significant person in their lives, a consistent figure who knows their interests and potential.
5. Need more dialogue among parents, teachers, civic groups, policy makers, faith community, and others.
6. Children need to come to school ready to learn—pre-K and earlier school experiences; language development and vocabulary, verbal literacy, life experiences; understand the purpose, language, and conventions of school.
7. Dropout problem; raise expectations; students say they are bored; they need hands-on learning experiences, especially those tied to real-world, vocational interests.
8. Schools and churches should eliminate barriers. [Don't have more on this one.]

Early Childhood Learnings

Mission Statement

All young children in Clarke County will experience high quality early care and learning that prepares them for success in school and life.

1. The quality of parental care during the child's early years is the major determinant of a child's school success. (NICHD study)
2. Young children learn and develop best when their parents and other caregivers are knowledgeable, skilled and able to relate positively to them and their unique needs
3. Young children who are in families challenged by teen parenthood, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, poverty, or parent's history of childhood maltreatment need resources and support to address these challenges.
4. If you can't pay for child care you can't work; at least one company in Clarke County provides child care vouchers for their workers for a significant portion of their child care costs. We don't know about what other companies provide for child care benefits for employees (e.g., UGA, hospitals).
5. There is no sick child care in Clarke County; we don't know what models there are for this. Although there is a reported need for non-traditional care (e.g., drop-in, overnight, weekend), we don't know what the extent of use would be if provided.

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6. Children who receive high quality care and learning opportunities during the preschool years tend to be more successful in school and later in life. Programs providing high quality care tend to have well-educated staff and lower child/teacher ratios; this increases their cost (NICHD study).
7. 41% of parents who called Child Care Resource and Referral reported that they could not find child care that met their needs – of those whose needs could not be met, 47% were because of the cost of child care. Four years of child care costs more than four years' tuition at UGA.
8. Child care assistance for people in poverty in Georgia is frozen; there has been no increase in funding for the past 5 years. Presently there is no assistance in Clarke County for families in “near poverty”; children living in near poverty tend to receive the poorest quality out-of-home child care and learning opportunities (NICHD study).
9. Even parents who can afford quality child care cannot always obtain it because many high quality centers and homes have waiting lists. Publicly funded programs for children in poverty also have waiting lists. As of March the waiting list for universal Pre-K was 198 (520 children enrolled), for Even Start 75 (163 children enrolled) and for Early Head Start 154 (80 children enrolled).
10. In Clarke County, 29 % of the children entering pre-K scored below age or average developmental ability.