

Renewing our Schools,
Securing our Future



A Report on:

***Community Schools:
Working Together to Address the Needs of All Children***

August 27, 2004 - Portland, Oregon

PARTICIPANTS:

Task Force Members:

- Louis Caldera, President, University of New Mexico
- Margaret McKenna, President, Lesley University
- Delia Pompa, Principal, DMP Associates and former Director, Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs
- Chauncey Veatch, National Teacher of the Year, Coachella Valley High School, Thermal, CA

Panelists:

- Susan Castillo, Oregon State Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Diane Linn, Chair, Multnomah County Commission
- Lorenzo T. Poe, Vice-chair, Board of Education, Portland Public Schools and Director, Office of School and Community Partnership, Multnomah County
- Johan Edelman, Executive Director, Stand for Children
- Barbara Kienle, Director of Student Services, David Douglas School District

Teachers and Parent:

- Heather Herrin, Teacher, Earl Boyles Elementary School
- Heidi Patterson, Teacher, Earl Boyles Elementary School
- Tyler Carlson, Parent of a SUN student

INTRODUCTION

Community Schools: Working Together to Address the Needs of All Children, the first of six public education forums lead by the *Renewing our Schools, Securing of Future* National Task Force on Public Education, was held at Earl Boyles Elementary School on August 27, 2004. Approximately 165 people joined Task Force members to hear from our distinguished panelists, learn more about Oregon's model community schools program, and participate in dialogue surrounding the needs of Oregon's children. This 2-hour event provided a forum for local and state leaders, child and education advocates, and parents and community members to highlight the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods initiative and its challenges, strengths and successes.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND THE SUN INITIATIVE:

Community schools seek to unite and strengthen schools, families and communities to improve student learning. Oregon's Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative, begun in 1999, is now in 46 of Oregon's public schools and is proving to be a successful community school model.

The SUN initiative is designed to improve the lives of children, their families and the community by developing schools as neighborhood "community centers." SUN Community Schools are partnered with institutions such as libraries, parks, community centers, neighborhood health clinics, area churches and businesses to broaden educational resources, bring the community together, build relationships, and strengthen families.

Goals of the SUN initiative include:

- Improving student achievement, attendance, behavior and other skills for healthy development and academic success by increasing capacity of the local schools to provide a safe, supervised and positive environment for expanded experiences.
- Increasing family involvement in the schools and school-based programs.
- Increasing community and business involvement in the schools and school-based programs.
- Improving the system of collaboration among school districts, government, community-based agencies, families, citizens and business/corporate leaders.
- Improving use of public facilities and services by locating services in the community-based neighborhood schools.

PRESENTATION HIGHLIGHTS:

Participants in this forum focused on community schools and Oregon's successful implementation of the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods initiative. Panelists spoke on the importance of providing students with access to afterschool programs and community resources and services, and discussed the effectiveness of the SUN initiative. Panelists also addressed the challenges faced by community members who struggle to maintain the needed investments in education.

Susan Castillo, Oregon State Superintendent of Public Instruction, set the stage by addressing the state's education system and its strengths. Oregon's focus on a P-16 system requires two components for success: adequate investment and commitment to make schools work. The SUN initiative shines light on Oregon's commitment and the bringing together of all community partners to focus on how you create success. With partnerships targeted on communities of greatest need, the SUN initiative is getting positive results and connecting all of the pieces (including parental involvement) to ensure success for children and close the achievement gap. The state has also set priorities on full-day kindergarten and a focus on early literacy. It is encouraging the use of Title I funds for these purposes. Literacy assessments at the elementary level show gains, but the state has much work to do at the middle and high school levels. Students need to be able to "read to learn" in those grades.

Diane Linn, Chair of the Multnomah County Commission, spoke on the concept of the SUN initiative and its effectiveness. She noted that it's catching on and is now in 46 schools, 17 more than the previous year. This expansion was done without any new financial support, but by reallocating county funds. The initiative provides a full set of services and programs for kids, including in-school support teams, so that they can focus on their academics. Linn also discussed the importance of afterschool programming that engages in relevant activities, and the inclusion of cultural competency - a key component to program success. Although not all of Oregon's schools have the SUN initiative, she pointed out that it's a clear cut "best practice."

Lorenzo Poe, Vice-chair of the Board of Education and Director of the Office of School and Community Partnership, discussed the student achievement gap as well as positive SUN outcomes. He noted the importance of taking poverty and race into consideration to close the achievement gap and the need to include cultural perspectives in any solution. He stressed the importance of including poor and racial minorities in the design of programs to ensure success. The SUN initiative's afterschool component, which he referred to as much more than "constructive recreation," is one successful piece of the SUN initiative.

Jonah Edelman, Executive Director of Stand for Children, identified the five key components of a high-quality afterschool program:

- Focus on achieving concrete outcomes such as improving student achievement and attendance, decreasing behavior problems, and promoting key assets;
- Engagement of high-risk students,
- Links to school curriculum and academic content, but not delivered as in school
- Consistent student attendance of at least 3 days per week, and
- Quality staff that reflects the community and knows about engaging learning strategies.

Edelman provided, from the advocacy perspective, the following three recommendations: support of block grants for comprehensive afterschool programs, full funding of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and full funding of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Barbara Kienle, Director of Student Services for David Douglas School District, highlighted the service component as the touchstone of the SUN initiative. She also addressed the ways in which the SUN program helps students meet academic benchmarks. The David Douglas School District looked at student assessment scores and identified the students that didn't meet their benchmarks. They then offered afterschool classes to these students designed to help them improve their performance.

TASK FORCE AND PANELIST DIALOGUE

Task Force members presented follow-up questions to the five panelists on a variety of issues including school partnerships, community outreach, parental involvement, diversity, and teacher certification. A synopsis of these discussions is below.

Changing Demographics and Cultural Competency:

Oregon is becoming more diverse, like most of the country. A large component of the panelist and audience participation segments included the discussion of cultural competency and the need to include it in training and curricula. The state is expanding curriculum materials and assessments into Spanish and Russian. Mexico has provided free materials in Spanish.

Assessment of Parental Involvement:

The missing piece of the SUN model was identified as the assessment of parental involvement to determine what kind of impact the SUN program has had on parental behavior and the level of parental involvement. There is, however, anecdotal data that parents are positively affected and are more involved.

Outreach to English Language Learners:

The SUN program reaches out to language minority families in several ways: they offer school materials translated in the top three languages spoken, they have translators present at each school event, and they place a liaison to these families in every SUN school. In addition, if and when there is little or no involvement from the families of English language learners, the school liaison or translators calls students homes to welcome parental involvement.

Community Involvement and Success:

The SUN program builds on community involvement and support. The program only goes to schools in communities where there is system integration and relationships between community members, government agencies and businesses.

Classroom and Afterschool Staffing:

There is diversity in SUN classrooms and afterschool programs. Although certified teachers are in many of the rooms, the SUN program does not require that all teachers be certified.

STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND PARENT PERSPECTIVES

Students, parents and teachers shared with us their community school experiences and took advantage of the opportunity to address the needs of children and their families.

- Heather Herrin is a first-grade teacher who also taught afterschool and summer SUN classes designed to help students reach their reading benchmarks and improve their reading skills. With the presence of the SUN program in the community, she has seen great progress in connecting the schools with families and with students. She noted that the program has helped with the inclusion of families and in making parents feel successful.

- Hiedi Patterson is a third-grade teacher who also taught afterschool SUN classes designed to help students meet state assessments. After teachers identified students in need of additional help, she was able to develop a curriculum to help these students pass their assessments and met with them on a regular basis. She concluded that providing afterschool teachers with the freedom to design curriculum was a key to program success.
- Tyler Carlson, the parent of a child in a SUN school, referred to the school as a microcosm of the neighborhood. He noted that everyone in the community knows each other and “that’s why the SUN program is so important.”
- Two elementary students attending a SUN school shared with participants their favorite SUN classes which included: jewelry making, European traveling, South American traveling, science and illusions, and the book club.

In response to these remarks, Task Force members asked a few follow-up questions regarding political will, partnerships and pre-kindergarten education. Excerpts from this question and answer segment are provided below.

Political Will and Advice:

The biggest challenge associated with support for educational programming is the generation of revenue. Advice to other cities on a similar quest is to be strategic in messaging. It’s a challenge to gain community support when attempting to create methods of dedicated revenue.

Partnerships and Relationship Building:

The toughest element of partnerships is getting the cultures of each bureaucracy to give up a little in order to meet in the middle. It’s important to see the value of each partnership and to stay involved in an effort to maintain values and support.

Pre-kindergarten Education:

What’s key to preschool programs is: engaging parents and families and forming positive connections. For Oregon, it’s about expanding access and ensuring quality and accountability in pre-school – typically not terms used in the past to reference pre-school programs. But ensuring the quality of the programs and assessing how these programs help prepare kids for kindergarten is part of the state’s work in moving forward.

In comparison to other states, Oregon is behind in pre-k because the tax system or revenue base to address all the needs of children - afterschool, pre-k and k-12 funding - does not exist. While it’s impossible to choose among them because they’re all important, investments in pre-k are the best place to invest in terms of student achievement and savings.

As the Task Force travels, it is recommended that they look at: 1) the rush to turn toward quick fixes, and 2) the need to implement a comprehensive plan / holistic approach so that we don’t lose our kids.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Task Force members and panelists turned to the audience to hear more about community needs and experiences. A great deal of the audience commentary surrounded food and health issues,

including funding and availability of programs and services. The highlights of this discussion follow.

Comprehensive Funding:

Sustainability is a worry. A comprehensive funding model with dedicated funding is necessary.

Food and Nutrition:

Food and nutrition is a big issue. There is no comprehensive food program in the county and the SUN program is taxing on the emergency food system. Only one-fourth of the programs in the area are using the federal food programs that are available to afterschool programs.

Communities should be concerned with keeping kids healthy so that when they return to schools in the fall they are ready to learn. Food shouldn't be an afterthought.

Fun:

Don't forget about fun in schools, which should be part of the curriculum. Middle school is when kids decide to drop-out and high school is when they actually do it.

Communication and our Kids:

We need to talk to our kids and learn why they don't like school and what doesn't work for them, and what they need to survive in their world, not just the world of adults.

Health:

Make school-based health clinics a part of each school. There has been a 16% increase in Oregon's uninsured.

Sharing of Resources and Knowledge:

The final audience member to speak asked a question of the panelists and Task Force members:

Q: Afterschool program coordinators and summer college student staff need the same training as certified teachers with respect to cultural competency. Are there any models at the national or state level to bring afterschool programs together to share resources, information and knowledge on cultural competency training? This would be very beneficial to afterschool coordinators and directors.

A: Afterschool programming is a newer field. It's possible to offer centralized training but there will be financial implications.

A: Training, with respect to cultural competency and diversity, is on Oregon's agenda and could perhaps be part of an in-service agenda, although there are financial implications that will have to be taken into consideration.