

**Facing Facts 2008
Community Forum
November 19, 2009**

Discussion topic: Middle and high school trends and outcomes, implications for the economic future of our region.

Question 1

Middle school performance outcomes, generally accepted as the results of academic preparation in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, have traditionally been an indicator of later high school graduation rates.

Reading on grade level in middle school grades is a critical indicator of a child's potential for future academic success. **What can or should the community, its schools, and families do to improve literacy levels in both youth and adults?**

Response(s):

Offer more after-school programs that are free or affordable at churches, schools or other sites. Other ideas include enriching parenting skills (with an emphasis on reading), offering free books to students, and early childhood education. Additionally, there needs to be a strong emphasis on kids' reading levels in elementary school. More summer reading needs to be mandatory if a child is reading below grade level. Increased use/emphasis of libraries is also important.

Question 2

What do you think would be some effective new or non-traditional ways for the local community to invest in improving academic success during the middle and high school years?

Response(s):

- More faith-based involvement in support of education.
- More tutoring (mentoring) done by the at-large community.
- Increase incentives for children to read more. (Develop book clubs, reading competitions.)
- More hands on leadership from school district superintendents.

Do you have any suggestions for improving the overall literacy level of adults 25 years of age or older who do not have a high school diploma or a GED?

Response(s):

- More local sites for adult training. Take advantage of Adult Ed. and technical colleges.
- TEC is good, but the personal touch helps those with minimum or very basic skills.

- Increase the awareness of the benefits of high school diplomas (re: Salary differences over a lifetime.)

Question 3

As a local community, a multi-county region and a state, we are at an economic crossroads - the global economy has changed both the demand for the kinds of products and services it chooses to purchase; and from whom they will be purchased. This in turn has changed the requirements for academic preparation and worker skill development.

In your opinion, has the at-large community and its public and private institutions recognized and become actively engaged in adapting to competitive requirements of the global marketplace?

Response(s):

Somewhat, due to unemployment and their attempts to re-enter the workforce.

Do you have any suggestions as to specific ways through which the community might engage to enable the community to become more competitive?

Response(s):

- Continue outreach and education; mentoring.
- Churches in the community need to step up.
- Have the community designate days, times, and places to expose people to activities that would help them improve their social skills and awareness of education improvement opportunities.

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Discussion topic: Early childhood education, its economic and social impact upon the individual, families, and the community.

Question 1

Armed with the scientific evidence concerning the public importance and economic value of early childhood education, **why, in your opinion, doesn't the 0 to 3 years early childhood education investment have a higher priority for public support and funding?**

Response(s):

- There is a general lack of awareness of brain development in the 0-3 year-old population. Many people don't see the direct impact of early-early childhood education. Young parents also don't understand the issue for their children. Other people in general don't see the need to help parents with children that young. They think it's just the parents' responsibility.
- There is a lack of willingness to accept the facts of the importance of "early-early education."
- Many lawmakers have a higher-education focus instead.
- IT MUST BE DONE!

In your opinion, is the community aware of where and how to access the resources available through early childhood development programs?

Yes, but there are not enough programs, funding and resources available. In general, a lack of resources.

Question 2

Identify, if possible, some new or non-traditional ways for the local community to engage within itself to improve early childhood development outcomes.

Response(s):

- Increase awareness through a public campaign – innovative publicity campaigns.
- Public-private partnerships.
- Churches – with volunteers, mentors.
- The community needs more parent centers.
- Neighborhood child care in communities.

Question 3

Identify likely long term implications of the community's failure to successfully engage negative community issues contributing to poor early childhood education experiences and outcomes.

Response(s):

- There are economic development implications – a lack of prepared future workforce. Jobs will go where the skilled workforce is available (i.e. NC and Ga.)
- Crime rate increases
- Dropout rate increases
- More low achievers
- More people on public support
- More children in poverty
- CONTINUING THIS CYCLE.

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Discussion topic: Adult attitudes and perceptions toward the economic and social importance of individual educational attainment levels, professional growth, and skill development.

Question 1

In this difficult economy, there seems to be a favorable shift in the community's attitude toward continuing education as a constructive pathway toward economic advancement.

What are people saying today about why they are investing in their continuing education?

Response(s):

It's necessary to be more marketable and get a job that pays adequate wages with benefits and career opportunities. It's necessary to be competitive in the global economy and not be unemployed. Changing technology requires new and better skills, computers skills for the future.

Do you think that this is a short term phenomenon or a major shift in the working age population's thinking about sustainable personal economic security?

Response(s):

It must be a long-term perspective. Most all people recognize there has been a major, permanent shift in the economy. Life-long learning needs to become more valued. People should link getting an education to getting a job. A value needs to be placed on learning trades (plumbing, welding, etc.)

Question 2

What about that portion of the adult community who **do not** currently have marketable skills?

What can or should the community do to positively promote "skilling up" to this portion of the population who are in danger of becoming marginalized in the new 21st century workplace?

Response(s):

- More mentors are needed for these people. Encourage volunteers to read to children. Offer support programs to parents, where they place a value on

education. More media coverage of the need to skill-up and available resources to include emphasizing current programs that people don't know about (Saturday morning reading programs.)

- Job fairs – info about jobs / opportunities.
- Importance of education on earnings. Promote awareness of the importance of increasing job skills, licenses and certifications.

Question 3

If people invest in their continuing education, but the jobs and corresponding wage levels don't materialize, **what will they likely do?**

Response(s):

- Relocate. Commute. Start their own business. Turn to crime. Return back to school.

How should the community invest now to counter these possibilities?

- Need for more public assistance. Offer business incentives to hire people, tax credits.
- Invest in infrastructure, school system.
- Community must become more involved, especially public entities (local boards.)