



TO: The Honorable Fel Lee, District 2, Chairman
The Honorable Becki Couch, District 6, Vice-Chairwoman
The Honorable Cheryl Grymes, District 1
The Honorable Ashley Smith Juarez, District 3
The Honorable Paula Wright, District 4
The Honorable Constance Hall, District 5
The Honorable Jason Fischer, District 7
Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent

FROM: Jacksonville Public Education Fund, on behalf of
ONE by ONE Convention Delegates and Conversation Participants

DATE: January 23, 2013

RE: Results of the January 5 ONE by ONE Community Agreement Convention

Introduction

In the fall of 2011, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund launched an initiative to build citizen involvement in public education in Duval County. Based in part on successful models from other areas of the country, the ONE by ONE campaign sought to engage members of the public in deep conversation about public schools. The ultimate objective is to unify the community around a set of shared goals and action steps in alignment with the Duval County Public Schools Strategic Plan.

The 169 conversations, intentionally held in every part of Duval County and demographically balanced¹, included more than 1,600 people who voiced their aspirations for the public education system. The need for such engagement was clear: Nine in 10 participants said that it was important that they be involved in decision-making about education, but fewer than half said they understood how the decision-making process worked.

¹ inBRIEF, Issue 4, "ONE by ONE: Defining Jacksonville's Priorities for Education," October 2012.

What we found is that despite Jacksonville's diversity, our community is clearly unified around shared priorities. At the conclusion of the conversations, delegates from all over the county were either nominated or applied to represent their communities at the ONE by ONE Community Agreement Convention on January 5, 2013.

From the 15 distinct themes that emerged from the conversations, delegates voted on the four top ideas held in common by most participants. It is important to note that the 172 delegates were composed not only of traditional community leaders, but also emerging grassroots leaders and students who are committed to moving our public schools from good to great on a neighborhood and school level. Ninety percent of the delegates said in a post-convention survey that they felt more encouraged about the district's commitment to working with the community.

The delegates and our organization are grateful to the several current and former Duval County School Board members who were able to attend the convention and participate in the rich discussion of priorities and ideas for community involvement.

The goals of this memo are to:

- Provide information to Duval County School Board members and district leadership about the top priorities of the community that emerged from this process;
- Request, on behalf of the thousands of citizens who have participated in ONE by ONE, the incorporation of the community's priorities in the district's Strategic Plan; and
- Offer some initial ideas and support for bringing about community-based action on these priorities in alignment with the Strategic Plan.

The Priorities

During the convention, the delegates gathered in groups to talk about each theme in detail, having reviewed in advance the full results of the 169 community conversations. After discussion, the delegates voted on four top priorities, including the most important issues to be addressed within each priority. They are:

Educate the Whole Child.

- Individualize instruction to meet the unique needs of each child.
- Ensure art/music/counseling/vocational education opportunities.
- Prepare students for a global world as a moral obligation.

Great Teachers and Leaders.

- Provide purposeful, focused and ongoing professional development of new and existing teachers and leaders.
- Teachers and leaders need time to teach and train, without being taken away from their classes.
- Recognize, respect and pay teachers as professionals.

Policy and Political Reform.

- Autonomy, flexibility and local control is needed.
- Ensure transparency.
- Use research and evidence-based practices.
- Elect highly qualified, responsive and informed public officials.

Family and Caregiver Involvement.

- Increase two-way communication.
- Ensure that schools are physically and emotionally accessible and welcoming.
- Educate and empower families and caregivers.

These priorities have been published into a document called the ONE by ONE Community Agreement. The Jacksonville Public Education Fund, in an effort to build more awareness and support among citizens citywide, has been asking members of the public to ratify the agreement and pledge their support to make these priorities a reality. As of January 23, more than 1,200 people have ratified the agreement, and the signatures continue to flow in, on track to surpass the goal of 2,000 by March 1.

It is our hope that the district and board should see the ratifiers, delegates and conversation participants as a citizen army that stands ready to support the schools in a variety of different ways.

It was exciting to hear Dr. Vitti pledge to the delegates that the input generated through the conversations and the convention would be funneled and incorporated into the Strategic Plan. It is clear that the goals of the community and the emerging priorities of the district have never been more closely aligned.

Based on the comments made by delegates at the convention, there is a lot of positive feedback in the community about Dr. Vitti and his vision for the district. They are very excited about his leadership style and the fact that the types of

strategies that he has begun to identify are mirrored closely by their priorities and ideas for helping public schools.

Moving from Conversation to Action

In addition to solidifying the community's top priorities, the delegates also spent time identifying how the community could partner with the schools to take action on each priority.

We wanted to ensure that you had some of the early ideas and commitments around the proposals put forward by the delegates around each of the priority areas. A sampling of these initial ideas includes:

Educate the Whole Child.

- Cultural organizations or local colleges of art provide space for student exhibits or experiences with arts and culture; or hold workshops for teachers on ways to integrate arts and culture into classroom activities.
- Businesses and other donors provide funding for cultural and extracurricular courses and materials (such as arts, language, music, physical education).
- Medical/health community provides additional screening, support and resources for student physical and emotional health needs (such as dental services, mental health screenings, workshops for teachers and staff on identifying physical/mental health issues in students).

Great Teachers and Leaders.

- The community can work to elevate the desirability of teaching as a profession and retain great teachers in Jacksonville through incentives and recognition.
 - Recognize the value of teachers' work through incentives such as better rates on student loans, housing incentives to come to Jacksonville and through highlighting great teachers in the media.
 - Reward high-performing teachers.
 - Have university students in education mentor high school students with interest in becoming teachers.
- The community is willing to step up and help increase professional development and mentoring opportunities.
 - Hold health-related workshops at local nonprofits or hospitals.

- Encourage companies to open their professional development opportunities to teachers, or provide executive coaching for principals.

Policy and Political Reform.

- The community wants to create a stronger infrastructure for at the neighborhood level for citizens to learn about and advocate for education issues on a county, state, and national level.
 - Create a system of neighborhood caucuses based on ZIP code.
 - Organize an advocacy council to make voices heard in front of the City Council and School Board.
 - Advocacy training for parents and neighborhood leaders.
- The community wants to continue its participation and would like to see the current levels of transparency and outreach continue. The community would like to see town hall meetings (similar to the ones that Dr. Vitti has been holding) at the school level to discuss climate and other issues.
- Educate the public on the funding formula for public education. The delegates believe the community is willing to pay for better education.
- Need a strong media/public relations push to improve perceptions of public schools and highlight successes in Duval County Public Schools.

Family and Caregiver Involvement.

- Create a task force of school district, community professionals and parents with expertise in parenting to combine resources to create a coordinated system of high quality parenting programs that empowers parents to become effective advocates for their children's achievement in school and includes metrics to measure parent involvement.
- Employers elevate the importance of parent involvement by giving time off for parent/caregiver training and school meetings, for employees to mentor parents; provide incentives for parents.
- Businesses should lead an initiative to support their employees volunteering in the schools (or take time to attend school-related functions for their children) through paid time off, flexible scheduling, etc.

Related to all Four Priorities:

- Create a user-friendly, centralized hub for direct community involvement with the schools, such as a website that would make it easy for community members, organizations and businesses to find out about specific needs (such as financial and volunteers) at schools and provide information on how those needs can be met.

- "Don't reinvent the wheel." Increase coordination and collaboration among youth-focused community organizations and between these organizations and the district and between these organizations and the community, especially as it relates to the four priorities. Share data among organizations to track and monitor efforts.

Based on the tremendous enthusiasm in the community for the specific actions they can take, our recommendation is to create an ongoing structure for joint district-community action. This is not a task that the district can or should take on alone. We would encourage the district to look at ways to build its capacity by partnering with external organizations who can facilitate community action to support the Strategic Plan. We look forward to working with district staff to develop the plans for such a structure.

Next Steps

With a better understanding of priorities we all share, it is our hope that the community and the school district can work together more closely to bring about improvements to our public schools with a goal of ensuring that all students graduate from high school college- and career-ready.

Building community support for public education is a continuous process. The Jacksonville Public Education Fund is committed to working with the district to increase public participation and support for the Strategic Plan. Once the Strategic Plan has been published, we will lend our support to ensure that it is well publicized and understood by the community. We will reconvene the ONE by ONE delegates at another meeting, for Dr. Vitti to present the Strategic Plan for their feedback and support.

We are also working to plan a *Rally for Unity and Action* in May in partnership with the district and multiple community organizations to bring together more than 1,000 citizens to show the broad support and commitment of the community for the Strategic Plan and their readiness for aligning their efforts behind it.

The delegates, along with the staff and board of the Jacksonville Public Education, would like to commend you for your efforts to engage the community around the important work of determining the future direction of Duval County Public Schools. We offer our support in any way possible to continue building on this positive relationship between the school district and the community at large.