

2000 Issue Forum Final Report

Human Needs

Members of the Human Needs forum sought information about the public school system's education plan and the extent to which it is being communicated to the public. They learned about magnet schools, truancy and at-risk students, working conditions in the public schools, graduation and dropout rates, and the Governor's school-grading initiative.

Key findings:

- Although the Duval County Public Schools is challenged to find qualified teachers and administrators, particularly for the elementary school grades, it has collaborated with the University of North Florida to develop the First Coast Education Leadership Center. The Center is designed to provide teachers and administrators with the training they need to improve their skills.
- Truancy is a major problem in the public-school system. Although the State Attorney's Office (SAO) has an effective anti-truancy program, it is limited in scope and focused at the elementary school level. Effective partnerships among the SAO, the school system, faith-based organizations, local businesses, and other community groups toward the prevention of truancy are needed.
- Stressful working conditions, school-grading requirements, student disciplinary problems, and high student-mobility and absentee rates continue to plague many local schools.
- Although the public school system has toughened its graduation requirements and is working to keep teachers and students accountable for their performance, many students continue to graduate with poor basic skills.
- The Duval County Public Schools has a long-term education improvement plan comprised of five key elements designed to improve student, teacher, and administrator performance, as well as to enhance the quality of the learning environment. However, the general public is unaware of this plan. Greater publicity of the plan may help improve public opinion about Duval County's public schools.

Action plan— Publicize School Board's Education Plan and Encourage Media Involvement:

Group members realize that school system improvements will require both immediate and systemic changes. Current improvement efforts by the Superintendent of Schools are positive and should be communicated more effectively to the general public. Specific timelines for improvement efforts should be set to ensure effective follow-up of goals and objectives. Accordingly, members of this forum will compose a letter that communicates support for the Duval County school system's current efforts. The letter will also contain other important findings from the group's interaction with resource experts. In addition, group members want to advocate to the media for increased coverage of positive education-related news, including the possibility of an Education section in local newspapers. Communication with *The Florida Times-Union* staff and with representatives from Channel 4 have already begun.

Community Leaders and Resource Experts

Issue forum groups met with both community leaders and resource experts who provided valuable information for group discussions. We wish to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the Forward process.

Christine Arab, HR Director, Duval County Schools

Tim Ballentine, Director, Research and Evaluation,
Duval County Schools

Jacqui Christopher, V. Principal, Landon Mid. School

Betty Coxe, Deputy Commissioner of Educational
Programs, FL Dept. of Education

Cindy Crawford, Teacher, Landon Middle School

Lenelle Cruse, Volunteer, Duval County Schools

Mary Freeland, Director, Jacksonville Children's Com.

John Fryer, Superintendent, Duval County Schools

David Hertz, Attorney, Duval Teacher's Union

Jon Heymann, Director, Communities in Schools

Bill Hodges, State Attorney's Office

Sylvia Johnson, Principal, W. Jacksonville Elem.

Morgan Miller, Program Director, Youth Crisis Center

Judy Poppell, Former Director, Magnet Programs

Issue-Forum Participants

Forum groups met biweekly for four months. They received information from knowledgeable resource people and additional written materials provided by Forward staff. Congratulations on your efforts and future civic involvement and advocacy.

Tricia Booker, Chair

Bill Joel, Vice Chair

Robert Gold (JCCI Advisor)

Carol Brock

Wanda Benton-Davis

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Marcus Haile

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