UGA Student Assists Community with Internet Access Questions

On November 13, 2012, University of Georgia Ph.D. student Lenie George met with representatives from Whitfield County Schools, Dalton Public Schools, and Georgia Northwestern Technical College to discuss how to enhance internet access in the community. In many local schools, fewer than 50% of students have access to the internet at home. Over the past eighteen months, local educators have struggled with how to provide equal educational experiences for students that incorporate technology when so few students have access to the internet outside of school.

At the meeting, participants discussed the possibility of creating a mobile hotspot via a library-sponsored book mobile, opening up schools between the hours of 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm for neighborhood families to take advantage of services, creating privately-sponsored “hot zones” in high need areas, and partnering with the faith based community to open up satellite libraries and internet cafes in key locations.

Over the next several months, Lenie will research how other communities have tackled this problem and will generate research that enables smart, fiscally-sound solutions.

Mayor Pennington Shares Local Literacy Commitment Nationally

Dalton Mayor David Pennington keynote address at the national "Literacy for All" conference shined a spotlight on community-wide efforts to promote literacy in Dalton and Whitfield County.

The Readers to Leaders community literacy initiative was one of the highlights at the national conference in Providence, Rhode Island. Mayor Pennington was joined by representatives from Dalton Public Schools, Whitfield County Schools, and The University of Georgia Archway Partnership. They shared the community's story about the public commitment of the four local governing authorities – Dalton City, Whitfield County Government, Dalton Public Schools, and Whitfield County Schools –along with the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce and the Archway Partnership.

Their unified mission to make literacy a community priority has the goal catching struggling readers early to ensure every child in our schools is reading on grade level in the early grades. Mayor Pennington was invited to welcome more than 1400 attendees, including literacy leaders and teachers, reading recovery teachers, school district officials, and university professors from across the United States as well as England, Australia and Bermuda. His invitation was due to his leadership, passion, and commitment to literacy.

The local representatives prepared a presentation for the exhibit hall describing the success of the Readers to Leaders initiative, to share the community's story, and to inspire other communities that are interested in a similar initiative.
Officials from Lesley University also heard Mayor Pennington speak during a roundtable discussion as part of the literacy training for district literacy trainers visiting from all parts of the country. Panel members shared how the literacy program that began in Dalton Public Schools nine years ago spurred local interest in education and literacy to develop into a community-wide endeavor. Mayor Pennington spoke passionately about his desire to unite the community to raise the level of literacy in the community and focus on helping all children read on grade level in the early grades. Representatives from Lesley University said his enthusiasm made him the natural choice to welcome guests to their national conference.

Cindy Downend, primary literacy collaborative trainer at Lesley University in Boston, introduced the Mayor saying he is a visionary who has worked hard to build relationships between the schools and community. She said those partnerships are critical to sustain an innovative initiative of this magnitude.

The conference was hosted by Lesley University in collaboration with the University of Connecticut, New York University, and the University of Maine.

**University of Georgia Team Helps Local Library Connect with Community Literacy Efforts**

Over the past several months, the Archway Partnership has worked closely with the Dalton-Whitfield community to enhance a new community-wide birth-to-work workforce development initiative known locally as “Readers to Leaders.” On Wednesday, October 24, University of Georgia College of Education experts Dr. JoBeth Allen and Roberta Gardner met with the Northwest Georgia Regional Library staff and other members of the community to discuss how the library could become a key player in the Readers to Leaders initiative in the Dalton-Whitfield community.

Northwest Georgia Regional Library
At the October 24th meeting, the UGA researchers shared 21st Century Library concepts employed in other communities. Roberta Gardner shared a PowerPoint demonstrating how libraries use book mobiles to deliver Wi-Fi access and computer training to underserved parts of communities. The group brainstormed about how the Dalton-Whitfield community might utilize trained volunteers to activate a similar book mobile service. The group also discussed restoring old school buses to serve as satellite branches.

In June, the library will hire a new director to take the lead on expanding the library further into the community. In the meantime, Interim Director Nick Fogarty and his team will continue to work closely with community members to develop a new vision for the library.

**UGA Professor Leads Training on Parent and Family Engagement in Education**

On October 23rd, UGA professor and parent engagement expert Dr. JoBeth Allen led educators from Whitfield County Schools and Dalton Public Schools in a training session focused on creating positive partnerships between families and schools. Dr. Allen’s interactive presentation, entitled “Creating Welcoming Schools in Literacy Collaborative Classrooms,” challenged local educators to think about how they can bolster student achievement by engaging parents and families in student learning outside of the classroom.

Teachers participating in Dr. Allen’s training

Ideas discussed during the session included: coaching parents on interactive read alouds; engaging parents and children in telling and recording family stories; assigning students to talk with parents about how they use reading in their jobs; helping students design “lessons” for family members; drawing on family funds of knowledge; planning family visits to learn about students; engaging families in two-way journals; and hosting book clubs.
Dr. Allen shares advice with Whitfield County teachers

Dr. Allen’s presentation and work reflects a commitment on behalf of the community and Archway Partnership to support the local investment in public education and the Literacy Collaborative.

**Georgia Tech Assesses Dalton-Whitfield’s Readiness for a Business Incubator**

In 2011, the Archway Partnership’s Diverse, Forward-Thinking Economy Issue Work Group began to consider how a business incubator might support potential startups and entrepreneurs in the community. After several discussions, a presentation from Georgia Tech, and a tour of the Chattanooga business incubator program, the work group recommended that the Archway Executive Committee hire Georgia Tech to conduct a business incubator feasibility study. The Executive Committee discussed this recommendation and agreed to move forward with the project with funding from the Joint Development Authority and the University of Georgia Archway Partnership.

Erin Rosintoski presents Georgia Tech’s community readiness assessment research
In May, Georgia Tech launched a community readiness assessment to determine whether the Dalton-Whitfield community can support a business incubator. On Wednesday, October 17th, the Georgia Tech team presented their findings to personnel from the Archway Partnership, the Joint Development Authority and the Greater Dalton Chamber of Commerce. Erin Rosintoski, a member of the Georgia Tech research group, presented the findings.

In the presentation, Georgia Tech noted that the Dalton-Whitfield community has several challenges, including the educational attainment among the community’s adult population; a decrease in businesses and employment since the onset of the recession; and a lack of funding available to would-be startups. However, they also noted several positive characteristics, including growth in the 55-64 year old age range, which is the age group with the highest rate of entrepreneurial activity nationally; growth in the local healthcare and social assistance, transportation and warehousing, and professional, scientific and technical service sectors; and the opening of over 500 new businesses in Whitfield County in the last two years. In addition, Georgia Tech noted that 36% of the patents filed in Whitfield County were not flooring related, that over half of the obstacles to success noted by entrepreneurs could be overcome by a business incubator, and that there was support for a business incubator among the community’s leadership and business owners.

Georgia Tech concluded that the Dalton-Whitfield area would benefit from the introduction of a business incubation program. However, the team proposed that the entity tasked with achieving this goal move with patience and caution, as there are significant key factors that must be addressed before an incubation program can be up and running.

The Joint Development Authority and the Archway Partnership are currently working with Georgia Tech to host a meeting open to the community where the results are shared in full. Following that meeting, community leaders will decide whether to pursue the next phase of the business incubator feasibility study.

Archway Partnership Facilitates Discussion of Expanding Mentorship & Tutoring Programs

On Wednesday, October 24th, University of Georgia researcher, Dr. JoBeth Allen, came to Dalton-Whitfield and met with coordinators from local mentoring and tutoring programs. Participants included members of the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Whiz Kids, United Way, the Mountain Top Boy’s Home, Readers to Leaders, and associates from Dalton Public Schools and Whitfield County Schools.
The group reviewed the positive aspects of each of their programs. They all agreed that they are meeting a need in the community. However, there are many obstacles standing in their way to grow in the community. To have a successful and sustainable mentor/tutoring program you have to have volunteers, transportation, and funding. It was stated that to make a lasting impact on a child’s life the mentor needs to be long-term. The current programs need volunteers who can commit to attending and commit for a period of time. In return, the program coordinators need to make volunteering with the children safe and easy.

Transportation to the program activities is also a necessity in the Dalton-Whitfield community. These programs offer a safe, fun and educational place for the children to go. Without the proper transportation they do not get the opportunity to learn, grow, and interact with people who care. This issue could be solved by potential participation from the faith based community. Many churches have vans and buses. They also have certified drivers. This could be a possibility to solve the transportation problem and also involve more caring people in the community. Funding is also a concern of the group members. To continue doing great work in the lives of children and the community, money is needed.
Overall, the discussion concluded with an agreement for collaboration between the programs. Each program needs to work together towards grants, volunteers, support and other areas. This collaboration will create a larger impact on the community and support the need for mentor/ tutoring programs in the area. Instead of everyone competing against one another, they can work and grow together.