

Public Safety Literacy Subcommittee Meeting
Wednesday, July 12 2:00 PM
Kids Hope Alliance Multi-Purpose Room

Member Presents: Connie Hall (Chair); Paula Renfro; Frank Denton; Rachel Fortune; and W.C. Gentry.

Subject Matter Experts Present: Debbie Verges (former Project Director for the Jacksonville Journey during Mayor Peyton's and Mayor Curry's Administration); Dr. Saralyn Glass (CEO of the Kids Hope Alliance and an expert in birth to 18); and Dr. Cheryl Fountain.

Dr. Connie Hall called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM.

Dr. Connie Hall stated in the last meeting, inventory was discussed. Today Paula Renfro will share information regarding inventory.

Paula Renfro shared DCPS is working on a chart that displays reading programs and scores in all schools.

Frank Denton asked if the chart includes adult literacy.

Debbie Verges responded that the district does not, but Rachel's includes all groups that are in the literacy space.

Dr. Connie Hall stated our target is reading by third grade, but we interchangeably talked about literacy. We need to be sure we are speaking a common language.

Chairman Gentry responded there are two major issues:

1. 3rd grade reading deficiencies
2. Community wide literacy campaign

We have a large segment of the population that is non-English speaking, as well as a large population that is illiterate. We were asked for two things:

1. Address issue of teaching children how to read
2. How to raise awareness in community regarding the importance of literacy

The hope is that this committee will focus more on the campaign to engage the community around literacy. We need the City of Jacksonville, Chamber of Commerce, as well as the whole community caring about literacy.

Frank Denton stated though awareness we could mobilize the community by having tutors from community, getting the chamber engaged, organizing business to adopt schools and have employees become tutors. Increasing awareness and mobilizing the community will collectively help find a cure in Jacksonville. This would include volunteers and money.

Regarding adult literacy, 70% of the prison population is illiterate. Many are still illiterate when they leave prison. This is an adult literacy problem which will cause problems with reentry and finding success if they can't read.

Dr. Connie Hall stated it's important to define how we will capture information as well as look at cost.

Chairman Gentry explained per the Mayor's Office, the charge states the Literacy subcommittee will meet with Kids Hope Alliance, staff of Public Library, Duval County Public Schools, ReadUSA, and other literacy initiatives to better ascertain the current literacy landscape citywide and identify opportunity for improvements, expansion, and remediation.

Dr. Saralyn Grass stated having a marketing campaign for awareness like the seat belt campaign or tobacco free campaign would be huge. These were two campaigns that made a significant shift in the behavior of people. This will require marketing, money and activating the community to accomplish.

Dr. Cheryl Fountain explained the reason the campaigns worked is because there were specific tasks people were asked to do. For example, "Buckle Your Seatbelt and Save Your Life." We need to figure out what the message will be. This is what will cause the shift. The goal is to figure out specific tasks for everyone that will result in mobilizing action and change.

Chairman Gentry responded he is not sure he agrees. It's one thing to say the campaign is important, but do you believe it. The group is trying to build up a system that involves the children, parents, churches, volunteers, business etc. We're letting the community know how important this is to create synergy. The two would feed on each other. It's not like there would be a literacy campaign here and an awareness campaign over there.

Dr. Cheryl replied to what chairman Gentry says is to create reading system for our children so everyone can read at grade level by 3rd grade. However, I don't hear concrete expected outcomes. I agree they feed on each other. But if you want to mobilize people to do something (and they don't know what to do), you must operationalize that value. You're doing a current literacy landscape that tells us what is, and the awareness campaign becomes the focus of what we want volunteers and businesses to do.

Paula Renfro stated the ReadJax campaign makes it very clear that the message is read 20 minutes every day.

Debbie Verges explained the campaign depends upon who the audience is. A comprehensive marketing campaign is needed. Historically there's only been a little money set aside, it has not been this comprehensive.

Chairman Gentry stated if money is put toward programs to teach non-English language community's how to speak English, they will come. Then that community will become mobilized because they are learning to read.

Dr. Connie Hall responded that the awareness campaign is the strategy, but underneath that will be components and strategies, the marketing campaign will be the umbrella. Once launched, the support systems unify the marketing campaign.

Frank Denton asked if there would be marketing and actions as parallel functions engaging the community in literacy. We also need to urge the Mayor to connect with ReadJax, KHA, Jacksonville Recovery Center (JREC) and the school district to continue their good work, as well as do other things such as including community volunteers, engaging businesses, and other actions. Frank would like to see the inventory to know whether there is a literacy program for ex incarcerated people.

He thinks we should ask the Mayor to make this a mission for the city. We need a high-level city-wide commitment to literacy at all levels, 3rd grade and beyond. We need to engage nonprofits, government, and private businesses.

Debbie Verges stated the business community will understand the return on investment. We need to make sure the message is in multi languages, so everyone reads the message. We need to look at what programs will drive the message as well.

At the first meeting, we discussed preparing for the main roll out, which is a marketing campaign. If we have funding and get some programs going now that will start generating interest. We're going to ask for money to do a marketing and planning campaign.

Dr. Connie Hall asked how marketing will be funded as it grows and how is the data shared. Someone must see the data and literacy rate in Jacksonville. The data is alarming in the same schools repeatedly. These communities are sometimes neglected. So where does that conversation fall. There's a desperate need.

Chairman Gentry stated as recommendations are made, a decision would come from the Mayor.

Dr. Cheryl Fountain stated that what we need is a citywide commitment to strengthen literacy at all levels. Once consensus is determined, then we can figure out where pieces fit to come up with recommendations. The community needs a simple sentence that everyone can understand. For example, "We need a community wide commitment to ensure every child can read and read well."

Chairman Gentry stated it's easier to market and engage people around children to make sure every child achieves their potential. If we can get people to deeply know about the literacy problem, the community will become more engaged.

Dr. Connie Hall asked when RFPs go out, how will it be handled.

Dr. Saralyn Grass responded literacy requires an RFP. For example, ReadJax has been in existence for over a year. We have funded 8 schools about 4 million dollars in initiatives with a four-prong component. There has been an awareness campaign (not sure if it has been large enough). We do have a website in place and distributing books to early learning centers. Training will begin with incentives to after school providers. There were over 1,000 children and 400 families in the literacy program from James Welding Johnson. I agree Marketing needs to be included. We also met with UF who has done a lot of literacy training with childcare providers and elementary schools. They are willing to partner with the local UF Health. They have access to 30 million dollars in Argo funds. If the community is willing to get involved, they can use money

to distribute as incentives for people to take training. They will also work with local partners for training the trainer, life coaching and monitoring. I think we can also make this one of our recommendations.

Dr. Connie Hall asks how there could be monitoring.

Dr. Saralyn Grass responded that the data could show how many schools are not passing 3rd grade reading. One of the goals was to bring schools out of lower percentiles.

Dr. Cheryl Fountain stated the information makes it easier to understand in a snapshot. We have 16 schools where 74% of kids read at levels 1 and 2. The community could monitor and get schools out of red zones to the next color. Over time you will be able to see how schools are making progress.

Rachel Fortune explained she had a great call with Phil Poekert (Lastinger Center for Learning). They have comprehensive development resources funded through national resources. We have asked for estimates as to what it would look like to support coaches, teachers, administrators, and other personnel around the eight Read Jax schools. We also spoke about a broader reach regarding target schools. The data was intriguing in Pinellas in comprehensive support of teachers and K thru K2 in schools. They have focused on the science of reading and developing matrix support for educators. This could be valuable for this group alongside the community push. They also use micro credentials for educators. This could be powerful for teachers and professional development.

Dr. Saralyn Grass stated we can advocate for training and follow-up. We need to prioritize this for long term goals. Also, making sure children are there to learn.

Paula Renfro responded attendance in k-2 is quite startling for our title 1 schools. Some believe that k-2 is not a real school. We also have more than 70% of teachers who are not professionally developed to teach students to read. Comprehension is a very discreet body of work. COVID, teacher shortages, and absenteeism have impacted the issue. Learning theory and cognitive science behind reading along with coaching is imperative for professional learning.

Rachel Fortune stated that Phil Poekert would share at the next meeting if the committee would like. It would be great to invest in a high profile visual for the community to see progress being made. We need to think about how cost and how it will happen.

Dr. Cheryl Fountain explained that transmitting knowledge is necessary, but once it's transmitted, it must be followed up and feedback provided. This will ensure teachers know how to implement per training and adapt to environments. We have not come up with another way to do this other than coaching, which is expensive.

Dr. Constance Hall asked how separate pots of money is received to collaborate and come together to be more sufficient and deliver professional development.

Dr. Cheryl Fountain stated that is a challenge. It's possible, but it takes a huge amount of time. One resource of funds is from the FDLE. Part of our strategy could be what we could take advantage of that would give us a boost to do an integrated project.

Rachel Fortune explained the next steps include data follow up to the Lastinger Center for Learning that include number educators and schools (teacher, coaches, administrators). We can look at the eight Read Jax schools, as well as all the title one elementary schools. If we can get the data and follow up, the Lastinger Center for Learning will overlay their menu with our data.

Dr. Cheryl Fountain explained the challenge we have with birth to five is we have a different level of preparation for the educators. If you can get a concrete proposal as a talking point and menu of services that will be helpful.

Chairman Gentry ask Rachel is she knew Pinellas County reading scores for 2021 – 2022.

Rachel Fortune responded she did not have that information, but she could find out.

Dr. Cheryl Fountain requested to know which schools were in their transformation zone.

Chairman Gentry asked if the Amira learning program has moved forward.

Paula Renfro explained this is something new with AI technology. The pilot began in the spring and will continue through September 30, 2023. It's one on one tutoring targeting 2nd and 3rd grade students. The AI technology is called Amira, as it picks up errors, provides corrective feedback. The children have opportunities to see oral language to help with vowel combinations or correct pronunciation. It will also stop and provide a lesson. The sessions are about 12 minutes and interactive with students and teachers.

When the technology started in the spring, there were 570 users for 2nd and 3rd grades. The data for summer users are being pulled.

The grant ends for the project ends September 30, 2023. There is another grant available to continue.

Dr. Connie Hall stated what do we do to sustain when we see results and success. When we look at the community and see success, after a while political structures climate changes, then program changes. This is a challenge.

Chairman Gentry explained we can build community support of programs. If community support is strong, politically it will be impossible to change. If we can engage the community around the work, I don't think they will sit still. Looking ahead to stakeholders and finding out who they are will engage the community.

Rachel Fortune shared an invitation to a business engagement community event Tuesday, August 8th, 8:00am – 10:00am at JTA headquarters.

Charmain Gentry stated the next steps are to get our lists. It would be great to have a meeting with everyone to find out what their needs are as well. We need to get the library involved as well.

A report is due next Tuesday, July 25th, and the final report is due in August.

The chairman also asked who major people are to be invited to the table (Read Jax, Chamber, City etc.)

We need to have a conversation with DCPS as we walk through the process to learn more about after school programs and working together. We should also note areas of intersection.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 PM.