

W.C. Gentry began by welcoming committee members to the meeting. He said education is at the absolute root of whether or not we have a responsible and safe community. One out of every three juvenile offenders do not read at a fourth grade level. Two-thirds don't graduate high school. These are our children. We either profit from or pay for who they become.

He said education reform is not something that occurs overnight. The committee will focus on three areas of change including early literacy (functionally learning before the child gets to school), truancy and dropout rates in our community, school relevance. There will also be another liaison community that will focus on school security along with members of other committees.

Gentry introduced Susan Main, Executive Director of Early Learning Coalition of Duval

Early Learning Coalition oversees all school readiness programming in Duval County. Administer state's voluntary pre-K program in 324 child care settings, which is about 7,800 four-year-olds. Their mission is to get children ready for K5. However, 25 percent of children in Duval are not ready to go to Kindergarten.

Crime and quality early learning are related. Children from low income families are most at risk of being involved in crimes if they don't have access to high quality programs. Also, according to studies many children lost gain at the end of K-5. So there is also a disconnect between the early learning programs and traditional schools.

W.C. Gentry reiterated Ms. Main's point saying the children were making significant gains with trained teachers, but backsliding once they entered the public school system.

Currently the ELC has 100 child care centers with trained coaches. Ms. Main said the programs work. They are effective and they are cost effective. They will help the overall educational system. We do not have the level of quality child care we must have.

Ms. Main said there are two main issues with the programming she heads now. One is connection. Many people who qualify for the programs don't know about them. And the other is resources. They don't have enough trained teachers in enough early learning centers. There are about 12,000 children who are four years old in Duval County. Currently they are only serving about 7,800.

She said we as a community must help them do better and get better as teachers by using the coaching model. There are 100 child care centers with trained instructors, but there are over 300 registered centers. There are currently only 24 coaches. They have only 1/3 of the trained personnel they need.

W.C. Gentry thanked Ms. Main for her presentation and said it would be a long road to fix the education gap in our community. He said we're making gains, but it's not enough. The good news, he said, is we know the answers.