



ENVISION

Creating Meaningful Change in Our Community

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

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ENVISION Task Force Completes Education Dialogue

DOTHAN, Ala. - The ENVISION P-16+ Education Task Force announced that it had completed its Community-Wide Education Dialogue and had compiled the findings and recommendations into an *Executive Summary* now available for review.

In December 2006, the P-16+ Education Task Force began the 5-month long Community-Wide Education Dialogue to gain input from key education stakeholders, which included employers, parents, students and educators, as to what issues or actions were most important to them. The Task Force wanted information directly from those who were currently and immediately impacted by local education and more importantly, to hear their suggestions for change.

The Dialogue process involved five education cohorts: (1) employers; (2) parents of children attending Dothan City or Houston County schools, both public and private; (3) current Dothan City or Houston County high school students; (4) current high school teachers; and (5) recent graduates of local K-12 schools who are now enrolled in certificate, two-year or four-year degree programs.

"In each part of the Dialogue, we asked and received names of stakeholders who want to be involved in crafting and implementing solutions," stated Dr. Barbara Alford, task force chair. "Through ENVISION, we pledge to make opportunities available to all area citizens who are committed to change and ready to roll up their sleeves."

The Task Force reviewed and discussed the Dialogue input at length before compiling the *Executive Summary*. Once completed, the *Executive Summary* was presented to city and county school leaders, both public and private systems, and to the entire community in support of education. Some of the observations and recommendations identified included:

- Many of the issues and challenges identified for both Dothan City Schools and Houston County Schools are the same. Systems should consider working together, and with area colleges, to address some of these needs, especially those that are cost-intensive such as career/technical education and more high school elective courses;

- Involvement of key stakeholders, such as the groups included in the Community-Wide Education Dialogue, must be increased and qualitatively enhanced;
- School systems should recognize the need for broad-based support of any proposed reforms and include constituents from the beginning of the process. Forums on finite issues such as school consolidation, et al, may bring out a vocal and emotional minority of stakeholders. But according to the Dialogue, organizational issues such as these are not the key issues for parents, students, teachers and employers. There is a difference between developing a plan through grassroots participation and minimizing resistance to proposed structural changes;
- According to students and employers, relevance is lacking in the current educational program. Both school systems should look closely at the relevance of courses and instruction, and determine ways in which to make learning meaningful for 21st century students;
- Both school systems should reconsider schedule options for classes. The block schedule system does not appear to be working, in terms of performance outcomes, and it is not, as once proposed, alleviating boredom in the classrooms;
- School systems and the community at large must find effective, sustainable resources to return the arts to area public schools at all grade levels; and
- Involve students, particularly at the high school level, in the decision-making process for issues that impact their teaching/learning environment (rules, regulations, activities, lunch and lunchroom, physical plant, etc.).

The Task Force advises that the issues raised during the Dialogue are intended for all of us as a community — the schools themselves, the ENVISION P-16+ Education Task Force, our local governments, our area colleges, our Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and organizations. From this Dialogue, the Task Force will select projects with objectives and benchmarks aimed at establishing a community culture of high expectations for education. The Task Force feels strongly that we do not have the luxury of putting in place new reforms or adaptations in the hope that they will succeed. "Failure is not an option," concluded Dr. Alford.

ENVISION Background:

In October 2005, area officials came together to undertake a comprehensive planning effort that allowed citizens, elected leaders and business leaders to identify key issues to address so that continued improvements could be made in the Wiregrass area. The final result was the "ENVISION Community Strategic Plan." The "Strategic Plan" outlined specific, detailed goals, objectives and action steps for our community to take in order to

achieve its ideal future. And to obtain this ideal future, the ENVISION initiative needs to ensure a healthy economy and growing community.

ENVISION is an inclusive, community volunteer initiative operating in collaboration with the Wiregrass Foundation, Dothan Area Chamber Foundation, City of Dothan, Houston County and Dothan Area Chamber of Commerce as significant partners.

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