

Looking At The ISSUES

July 28, 2006

Controversies in Education

As a nation we agree that our goal for public education is to create a well educated citizenry that will enable us to maintain our competitive status in an increasingly competitive global economy. The KnowledgeWorks Foundation has been conducting Ohio public opinion polls (Ohio's Education Matters Poll) on a variety of questions. From those polls we know that the majority of Ohioans reflect the national commitment to education.

- **87% Agree:** The success of my community is tied to the success of our public schools (2004.)
- **86% Agree:** Raising the educational level of a community will lead to better social and economic conditions in that community (2005.)

The Stark Education Partnership asked KnowledgeWorks to check and see if Stark County was in sync with the Ohio polls and the answer came back that we match the statewide opinions.

In Ohio, we are agreed that entire communities should be involved in accomplishing that goal. Again, the KnowledgeWorks poll data is helpful:

- **87% Agree:** Everyone in the community should be more involved with local public schools (2001-02.)
- **85% Agree:** Students, schools, teachers and the community all share responsibility and accountability to promote safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments (2002-03.)
- **91% Agree:** Schools should invite parents and other citizens to advise the schools in important decisions (2004.)

Stark County citizens in partnership with educators are seriously attempting to avert cynicism around community involvement reflected in the Ohio's Education Matters Poll, published 2002-03 by KnowledgeWorks Foundation:

- **59% Agree:** The only time school officials conduct outreach to the community is when they want something.
- **65% Agree:** The community does not know very much about what is happening behind school doors.

GEAR-UP Letters Sent

*Canton seniors will soon be receiving a letter about awards they have earned passing sections of Ohio standardized tests. As part of the 2001 GEAR-UP Grant, Stark Education Partnership is providing \$25 for each test passed in 6th grade and in 9th grade. Students may have earned anywhere from \$25 to \$250. The money can be used to participate in the ACT and/or SAT tests, pay college application fees or deposits, or to buy college text books. *The graduating class of 2006 has accessed over \$40,000 thus far.**

Questions or Comments?

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Many school districts in Stark County have created numerous opportunities for meaningful community involvement and our Stark County P-16 council is often cited as a national model for community engagement. Our local agencies, school districts, colleges, foundations and the business community have a long history of collaborative work towards common goals.

As a nation, we are not as clear about how we will know when our goal for education is accomplished. Sometimes we don't agree about what should be taught or how what is taught should be measured. We tend to approach these questions with unexamined assumptions that are rooted in our personal educational and work experiences as well as what we read.

For as long as there has been public education in these United States, professional educators have been issuing reports that decry the status of education with the prediction that our future citizens will not be well enough educated to make us competitive. Currently, on any given day, new reports raise questions and create controversies about student performance or the data that is used to quantify student performance. In the past three years, the reports have included the world of higher education.

Practicing P-16 educators would tell you that the result of the controversies is the creation of obstacles to progress because time is spent debating the issues rather than working on implementing what we know that benefits student achievement and finding new ways to support all students to success as high achievers. More importantly, the controversies confuse the public, create distrust and often erode support for public education.

Future *Looking at the Issues* will examine some of these controversies including calculation of graduation rates, standards, rigor, exit tests and funding for education. If you are interested in another controversy not on our list, please contact us and we will include it in our future discussions.

Looking At The Week

The Stark County P-16 Compact was cited in its new "Update on P-16 Initiatives" by the Education Commission of the States, the interstate education compact of the nation's governors and chief school officers (www.ecs.org).

The Stark Education Partnership is featured as a sidebar link on the *KnowledgeWorks Foundation's P-16 website* (www.kwfdn.org/p16/p16councils/)

Members of the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce Education Committee heard State *Senator Kirk Schuring discuss his School Funding Reform Proposal*. Dr. Joe Rochford represented the Stark Education Partnership at the meeting.