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5-17-14  
submitted by  
Pat Harris

Docket Item 14-2811

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Speaking as an individual without compensation in support of the Children and Youth Master Plan.

Interested as an ATC reading readiness tutor for kindergartners at Patrick Henry Elementary School.

Key Points:

The students at Patrick Henry are a prime example of racial, cultural, and economic diversity.

In the past two years, I have worked with ten students -- eight different ethnic groups with all the differences you would expect in family situation, English mastery, food likes, holiday celebrations, and favorite cartoon characters.

They do have one thing in common: this is their very first exposure to any type of educational program.

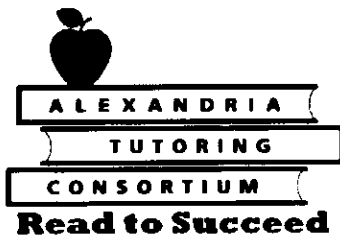
This is not because the adults in their lives don't care -- they all want desperately for their children to succeed. In my experience, it is because they were unaware of the importance and availability of pre-school programs or had been frustrated or even turned away when they had tried to find programs.

We need the coordination and outreach described in the Plan to find these families and their children as early as we can. We need the focus on awareness and on access.

We cannot wait for them to find us. We have to find them by coordinating with the organizations represented here today. With flyers in rental management offices, rec centers, grocery stores. Posters on the sides of busses. Maybe airplanes towing banners.

If we can find them early and get them prepared, the pay-off will be huge. We need to give it our best shot.

I'll end with a bit of good news and a word from my sponsor. Every one of those 10 unpredictable, frustrating, wonderful children passed the end-of-year assessment with scores between 95 and 100 and marched triumphantly into 1<sup>st</sup> grade. And the plug, of course, is for the Alexandria Tutoring Consortium. For now, it is the lifeboat and it needs your support.



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submitted by  
Gwen Mullen

Vision: Every Child in Alexandria Can Read and Succeed

Mission: To provide the foundation for future learning success by helping to ensure children in the Alexandria City Public Schools can read at or above grade level by the end of third grade

Remarks supporting the Children and Youth Master Plan by Gwen Mullen, ED, Alexandria Tutoring Consortium; member of Children Youth and Families Collaborative Commission

ATC's tutoring program is based on the research driven and proven Book Buddies program out of UVA's Curry School of Education. This means ATC staff members with Masters Degrees in reading related subjects are writing individualized lesson plans and providing materials for ATC recruited volunteers to use with Alexandria City Public Schools kindergartners and first graders who have been selected by their teachers to be tutored twice a week in literacy skills. ATC's mission is to help ensure all students can read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

Three years ago, 25% of ACPS 3<sup>rd</sup> graders were not proficient in reading on Virginia's state wide test. Each of the last two years the number was 24 %. Unfortunately, research demonstrates that if you can't learn to read by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, you'll have a hard time reading to learn in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and beyond because 50% of the material is incomprehensible. According to the 2010 Casey Foundation "Kids Count" report, those 260 plus ACPS third graders each of the last three years are on the drop out track!

I support the Children, Youth Master Plan because I believe if we can raise awareness and inform parents of school age children and members of the community about the Plans goals and strategies for reaching them, and engage them in actively supporting the City and Schools as they implement the Plan, together, we will begin to move the needle on third grade reading. This is important because research shows that reading on grade level by the end of third grade is a reliable indicator of who will graduate from high school prepared for further education work and life.

What is it about the Plan that makes me confident that implementing it can make a difference? The Plan's vision holds a clue – "All of Alexandria's children and youth succeeding today and tomorrow." It was the young people who urged the Commission to make this Plan about succeeding today, not just in the future.

Using Goal 2 - Every child will be academically successful and career-ready - as an example of how success today is supported by the Plan, the action steps begin by putting books in every Mother and child's hands from the time they are born and continues by saying barriers that exist today that inhibit high expectations and achievement for all children must be identified and eliminated now. One of the barriers some children we tutor need help overcoming is that they have a "fixed" instead of a "growth mind set" – one tutor told the story about the child she tutored who thought her intelligence and what she could accomplish was already set in stone for life and was so relieved to find out that with continued hard work and tutoring she could learn to read and master first grade skills ...and she did. During one of their last tutoring sessions she proudly announced she was being promoted to second grade!

Chronic absenteeism is another barrier to learning success - some of the kindergartners and first graders we tutor were absent 10 to 18 days during the third quarter!

The bottom line is that the Children Youth Master Plan will motivate us to shine a light on the barriers that must be eliminated and the gaps in services that need to be filled for children and families to thrive. The Plan is a living document that outlines goals, strategies and actions that can be taken so Alexandria's children and youth can grow up 1) physically safe and healthy, 2) academically successful and career ready and 3) socially connected, emotionally secure, and culturally competent.

I support City Council adopting this Plan. It has the potential for being transformational for Alexandria's children, youth and their families.