

2006 City Council Retreat Future Education Collaboration

Introduction

In 2005, the City of Longmont initiated its *Focus on Longmont* community-wide strategic planning effort to ensure that Longmont remains a distinct community with adequate resources to sustain the kind of life residents want to enjoy for decades into the future. Throughout this year-long process, community members identified Longmont's positive core—those elements that uniquely contribute to Longmont's quality of life and must be sustained well into the future, and the strategic policy directions that Longmont must consider now in order to create the future we desire as a mature, sustainable community.

One of the five strategic policy directions included in *Focus on Longmont* is for Longmont to support education as a community-wide value. While recognizing that education is not a service provided by the City, nevertheless the community believes we should make full use of the City's considerable capacity for responding to the wide range of educational needs that all residents have. Education serves a number of important roles in achieving the City's goals for a sustainable future. First, educational opportunities will help residents achieve their employment and economic goals. An educated workforce will help the City attract employers with quality job opportunities. Finally, a range of educational opportunities will continue to make Longmont an attractive and desirable place to live, attracting new residents over time as the City's population matures.

Community members expressed a higher level of concern about education than about any other strategic plan topic. They believed that the community must value education, support it, complement it, and reinforce it through a variety of activities. The City—along with business, not-for-profit organizations, and individual citizens—needs to find an appropriate way to be involved in the education of Longmont's young people. Participants said, in effect, that as a City and community, Longmont is not contributing as much to the education of its young people as it could, or should. For this reason, the policy directions for education emphasize a stronger partnership between the City and educational providers as the beginning of an answer.

The aim of this retreat discussion paper is to explore how the City of Longmont can be a collaborative partner with education providers to ensure that Longmont residents of all ages have access to appropriate lifelong learning opportunities. In this paper, we will review the National League of Cities "Municipal Leadership in Education" project and ways in which several municipalities throughout the nation have successfully partnered with public school systems. We will also review the "PK-16" education model that the State of Colorado and the St. Vrain Valley School District is considering, and which can serve as a framework for future City and broader community involvement in our educational system to prepare young people and adults for lifelong success. In the last

section of this paper, we will outline several collaborative efforts in which Front Range Community College, St. Vrain Valley School District and the City of Longmont are already involved that support the PK-16 model, as well as explore ideas for new and/or enhanced opportunities for educational collaboration that will successfully contribute to the community's quality of life, economic development and a strong citizenry.

Municipalities' Role in the Future of Education

Communities across the nation are facing many of the same educational challenges we are in Longmont, especially when it comes to wanting to be best prepared to not only succeed today, but over the coming years and decades. Like other critical aspects of our "community infrastructure", our ability to envision and plan for the future of education will play a large role in our overall goal of being a successful, vibrant community. The role of municipal leaders in the field of education was the topic of a special report completed by the National League of Cities titled "Stronger Schools, Stronger Cities." The study outcomes and lessons learned were reported in the attached September 27, 2004 copy of Nation's Cities Weekly newsletter (Attachment 1). Municipal leaders realize that whether or not they have formal authority for schools and education they nonetheless need to exert a more focused role in the education arena to ensure a successful future for their communities. Many promising best practices in municipal leadership and school improvement have been documented across the nation and could be further evaluated and researched to see how our community could benefit from implementing them here. What appears to be key common lessons learned are that successful efforts include the following ingredients:

- 1) sustained mayoral and council leadership;
- 2) well-defined municipal roles;
- 3) strong partnerships between the municipal government and schools; a commitment of City resources;
- 4) collection and analysis of good data to support the effort;
- 5) involvement of the business, faith and other community leaders;
- 6) ongoing and effective community dialogue; and
- 7) development and implementation of a community-wide plan that defines roles, responsibilities and holds everyone accountable for results.

Local/Regional Education Planning Opportunities

As mentioned above, communities throughout the nation are focusing their attention on efforts to ensure that all children have full access to the types of educational opportunities they need and desire to be successful in life. Locally, the St. Vrain Valley School District (SVVSD) has launched its five-year strategic plan, "Navigating our Course," which focuses on creating a learning environment where all students may develop to their highest potential and become contributing citizens in their communities. The district aims to accomplish its strategic goals by promoting high standards of learning and student well-being in partnership with the entire community. A copy of the SVVSD strategic plan can be found in Attachment 2.

The St. Vrain Valley School District is considering implementation of the PK-16 model within its educational system as a way to strengthen the learning environment for all students. The basic premise of the PK-16 model, which has already been implemented in several states throughout the country (sometimes referred to as P-16, K-16 or PK-20 models) includes an emerging national concern for understanding early childhood education, elementary, secondary, and higher education as a continuous system (see Attachment 3). A truly comprehensive and collaborative PK-16 effort is aimed at raising expectations and ensuring student success from pre-school through post-secondary education. PK-16 educators at all levels, members of the community, and businesses work together to raise the bar of academic expectations and achievement so that ALL students at ALL levels can compete in today's global community.

The St. Vrain Valley School District is currently taking steps to infuse a seamless education system that represents a PK-16 system, which reflects a central vision of a coherent, flexible continuum of public education that stretches from a pivotal pre-school education to post secondary education. A seamless system would focus on access to early childhood learning, closing the achievement gap for minority students, enhancing professional development, and strengthening relationships between families and schools. A PK-16 vision for the SVVSD embraces the ideals of an educational system where every child enters school ready to learn, elementary students are on grade level in reading and math; middle school students are engaged in algebra; and high school students graduate prepared for post secondary success.

PK-16 efforts are most effectively formed through state-level, system-wide collaborations among all of a state's major educational stakeholders. PK-16 initiatives exist in various forms throughout the country (see Attachment 4). Georgia, California, Kentucky, Minnesota, Maryland, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma and Massachusetts all have adopted the P-16 philosophy in one form or another. However, not all PK-16 initiatives are necessarily statewide, centralized endeavors. Incline Village and Washoe County are two very distinct partnerships that exist in local Nevada communities, but which are in partnership with higher education and part of a larger statewide initiative. In contrast, the initiatives in Georgia, California, and New Mexico involve the state as a whole, from institutions of higher education down through local communities. Partnerships are generally comprised of post-secondary institutions and local school districts. However, many initiatives have broadened the scope of involvement to include additional stakeholders in the educational context such as members of the business community and other local interests and organizations. Although some partnerships have been initiated at the statewide or higher education level, a number of them have been generated from the bottom up, with local stakeholders such as parents, boards of education, local industry and community groups carrying the torch.

In Colorado, state legislators are just now beginning to embrace the PK-16 initiative. Governor Owens recently created an Education Alliance Council to begin looking at a statewide systematic approach to education. In December, the Colorado Children's Campaign released a report entitled "High School Reform in Colorado: Meeting the Expectations of a New Era" (Attachment 5). The recommendations in this report are the

types of things that are being addressed by other states through their PK-16 collaborative programs. Senator Ron Tupa from Boulder County and Representatives Jack Pommer from Boulder County and Michael Merrifield from El Paso County are discussing carrying some type of PK-16 legislation in the 2006 legislative session.

Forming partnerships with and incorporating the goals of other local educational efforts will support and enhance the school district's PK-16 program. Front Range Community College (FRCC) is currently in discussions with the Career Development Center (CDC) about a future partnership to operate a lab school child development program for FRCC. This could help close the gap created after SVVSD closed its child care center at CDC. This lab school will serve as a training program for early care/education paraprofessionals which would expose students to a variety of early care/education school readiness models. The center would also serve as a child care center for FRCC and SVVSD staff and students as well as community members. Additionally, FRCC is exploring a partnership with Ute Creek Academy where students will be able to graduate with not only a high school diploma but also with a two-year degree. They are also exploring options to develop a program for paraprofessionals to obtain a dual language teaching degree and working with the Longmont Police Department and other criminal justice agencies to offer a post-police academy that could be developed into a program that will lead to a criminal justice degree. Finally, FRCC is exploring partnerships with Regis and other universities to offer a "3+1" program where students would attend FRCC for three years and a four-year institution for one year to earn their bachelor degree.

PK-16 presents key opportunities for the City of Longmont, the St. Vrain Valley School District, Front Range Community College and the entire community to work collaboratively toward a common vision of educational success for all. In the following sections, we will highlight some of the existing collaborative efforts that are important to sustain as the community implements a local PK-16 model, as well as explore some new ideas for collaboration.

Current Educational Collaboration Efforts

The following is an overview of the City's current collaborations with SVVSD, FRCC and others that realize the following PK-16 components: ensuring that all children are ready to learn when starting kindergarten; providing intervention efforts for at-risk students; and ensuring successful student transition between key educational levels.

Bright EYES (Early Years Education Stewards)—A Longmont Community Early Care and Education Collaboration: In 2003, a local ad hoc group of representatives from the City of Longmont, the St. Vrain Valley School District and several Longmont health, human service and children's service agencies formed to focus on ways that the Longmont community could work together to expand and improve early education opportunities for Longmont families to help ensure that all Longmont children have a healthy start in life and are ready to learn when they enter school. The overall goals for this effort include:

- 1) increase the availability of comprehensive school readiness programs,
- 2) enhance community awareness around the importance of early care and education,
- 3) provide enrichment activities for families and their young children,
- 4) provide opportunities for parental and community engagement,
- 5) enhance awareness and opportunities for children to develop cognitive and language skills, and
- 6) improve the social/emotional development and health of young children so they are ready to learn when entering school.

The following is a brief summary of the action steps that the Bright EYES group has taken toward accomplishing these goals:

- The City of Longmont has recently received two grant awards that will assist Bright EYES in achieving some of its goals. First, the National League of Cities awarded the City a technical assistance grant to assist Bright EYES in developing its community awareness campaign and efforts to enhance parent engagement. Second, the City was awarded a State Tony Gramscas grant that will bring the “Incredible Years” program to Longmont Head Start classrooms and to St. Vrain Valley School District preschool classrooms.
- Bright EYES has contracted with a marketing consultant to develop compelling messages and community education strategies.
- The City of Longmont has two funded capital projects to renovate its Meeker Center (839 Meeker Street) and former Fire Station #3 (next to Centennial Park) facilities that will house additional programs and services to Longmont children, youth and families. The Meeker Center will be transformed into a Family Resource Center that will house additional comprehensive school readiness programs, as well as resources and activities for the adjacent Kensington neighborhood. The former Fire Station #3 “living quarters” will be remodeled into flexible space that can accommodate a variety of activities for children, youth, families and adults living in the surrounding neighborhood. Both of these renovation projects will be completed in 2006.

A complete overview of the Bright EYES project can be found in Attachment 6.

Joint Use Facilities Agreement between the City of Longmont and the St. Vrain Valley School District: Since 1980, the City of Longmont and the St. Vrain Valley School District have operated under a Joint Use of Facilities Agreement, in which each entity agrees to make its public facilities available to the other at no cost to expand each entity’s capacity to serve the community in the following ways: youth and adult athletics; special events; before/after school programs; neighborhood programs and activities; summer and non-school day activities for children; education programs; classroom activities and field trips. The current Agreement is in the process of being revised and the revised Agreement should come before the Longmont City Council and the St. Vrain Valley Board of Education for adoption the first quarter of 2006.

School Resources Officers: The Longmont Police Department initiated its School Resource Officer (SRO) program in 1999. The St. Vrain Valley School District annually contributes to the salaries of the SRO's by paying 50% of their base salary during the school year (nine month period). Currently there are four SRO's directly assigned to seven schools. One SRO each is assigned to Longmont, Skyline and Silver Creek high schools. The fourth SRO divides her time between four middle schools (Heritage, Longs Peak, Sunset and Westview).

While SRO's do provide educational services in their assigned schools through such programs as Project Alert (resisting substance abuse) and Student Police Academies, their primary duty is to promote and facilitate school environments that are safe from crime and disorder thereby enhancing student learning and the development of positive social skills. The SRO's do so by carrying out all the traditional roles of a patrol officer. In addition, SRO's often attend after-hours school-related functions for the same purpose. SRO's are also considered school staff and often assist with the development of school-based policies, procedures and programs. They are also very involved in providing ongoing training and support to administrators, staff, teachers, counselors and interventionists.

Youth Risk Behavior Assessment and Response Planning: The City of Longmont and the St. Vrain Valley School District have worked together to administer the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to high school students throughout the district, and are currently collaborating on a community engagement effort that includes a parent focus groups, interviews with community leaders, a youth summit and a community summit. This process will result in the development of community-based action strategies to support young people around identified risk behaviors.

New and/or Enhanced Educational Collaboration

As previously mentioned in this paper, one of the five strategic policy directions that is critical to the City's sustainability as a mature, distinct and viable community beyond build-out of our Longmont Planning Area is to support education as a community-wide value. Some specific policies and recommended actions that the community suggested the City could implement are highlighted below:

Focus on Longmont Policies and Recommended Actions

1. Promote and support community activities to support education.
2. Promote partnerships between public and private sectors that enhance educational opportunities, from pre-school through college and beyond.
 - o Enhanced Opportunities for Community Support for Education – Promote community support through volunteerism and mentoring programs, and further explore opportunities to promote parental involvement in educational activities.

- Education Summit – Consider organizing an annual Education Summit, to bring together the community and organizations involved in education within the city (at all levels). The purpose of the Summit would be three-fold: 1) ensure that all educational providers/resources are in alignment with community needs and goals; 2) serve as a catalyst for ideas and actions to benefit community education, and 3) identify resources and opportunities for City and community involvement and initiatives.
- Continue to Provide City Support for Early Childhood Education and Front Range Community College (FRCC) – The City should continue to provide facilities and other resources to support early childhood and continuing education in the community.
- Establish a Permanent Location for Front Range Community College –Work with administrators and the community to identify and secure a permanent location for FRCC in the city.

Other Possible Actions for Consideration

In addition to the *Focus on Longmont* action steps recommended above, the following are some additional actions that the City, educational providers and the community could consider in order to move forward the strategic policy direction on education:

- Coordinate a community awareness campaign about the importance of educational success as a foundation to Longmont’s quality of life and future sustainability. Sustain ongoing community informational efforts that demonstrate the positive impacts of shared partnerships between the City and our educational systems and build momentum within the community for our continued work toward the future vision.
- Collaborate on creating and implementing a community-wide model that will engage parents and community members in schools and local government. The engagement model will need to be one that is inclusive of all voices and cultures and incorporates ways to move diverse cultures and perspectives toward common ground and shared understanding.
- Implement a Community Resource Schools model where public facilities (school and City-owned facilities) incorporate and/or house a variety of community-based services and programs that not only serve the broader social, emotional, health, cognitive, recreational, etc. needs of the students, but also those of the residents and families living in neighborhoods surrounding the facilities. This idea replicates and expands the family resource center model the City is implementing at the Meeker Neighborhood Center (as referenced in the Bright EYES section of this paper).

- Coordinate a Community Wellness Campaign that incorporates the healthy nutritional culture being established within the schools into an overall community wellness culture.
- Target neighborhood revitalization efforts in neighborhoods surrounding low-performing schools.

Summary and Discussion Questions

Throughout this past summer and fall, Longmont community members engaged in dialogues about how our community must plan now for our success as a sustainable mature community. Now, more than ever, the economic vitality of our community and our country depends on an educated workforce. Our children, and the generations of children to follow, will need far more knowledge and skill than ever before to make sense of the world around them, to make reasonable judgments about their lives, and to contribute to society. These combined realities require an education system where we must expect the vast majority of students to successfully complete education beyond high school. Even those students who go directly to work after high school will need additional training and education at some point in their working lives.

In order to realize this community vision, the Longmont community needs to strengthen its capacity and public will to address key educational challenges that lie ahead. With civic, educational and community leaders working together, we will create the best opportunity to ensure that all children have a chance to succeed in school and in life. Members of the Longmont City Council, the St. Vrain Valley Board of Education and Front Range Community College have the opportunity at this 2006 Longmont City Council Retreat to move this vision forward.

Suggested discussion questions:

- Explore possible City Council roles in supporting education as a Longmont community value (facilitator, partner, service provider, resource provider, etc.).
- Discuss possible partnerships and action strategies the City should take on as part of the PK-16 model.
- Prioritize the 1 – 2 most important roles/actions the City should accomplish in 2006.

Attachments:

1. National League of Cities publication, “Stronger Schools, Stronger Cities”
2. St. Vrain Valley School District Strategic Plan, “Navigating Our Course”
3. “What is P-16 Education?”
4. A Summary of P-16 Initiatives in Selected States
5. “High School Reform in Colorado: Meeting the Expectations of a New Era”
6. Bright EYES Overview