

Don Coleman for 7th District School Board

Unity in the Community

*Don Coleman's Community Connection Strategy for
Homes, Schools and Community Resources*

In previous generations, we all remember those vital and helpful relationships between our schools, our homes and our community. Education was everybody's concern. Those wonderful connections have been lost for too long. Restoring them is required if we are to initiate lasting solutions to the many needs in our education system.

For 20 years, I have enjoyed a reputation for building connections between people and institutions within our community. Through my volunteering with two very successful programs already operating in Richmond Public Schools; Virginia Heroes and the Armstrong Leadership Program I have gained experience and seen the value of connecting community resources with students. A very successful career with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro-Richmond (where I helped to install clubs in public housing) and relationships within the Micah Initiative are other examples of my awareness of the need to bridge gaps and demonstrate measurable progress.

It is time to restore these vital and useful community connections

Here are several practical examples of Don Coleman's Community Connection Strategy:

Homes

Problem -- "I wasn't informed of my child's graduation time until the morning of the ceremony. Every time I phone into the school I got conflicting answers." -Fulton Parent

Solution

1. Schools need a regularly **updated recorded information line** so parents can call for specific information such as special events, PTA meetings, or important notices.
2. For our school district as a whole we need to establish a **one stop hotline for parents** to be able to get information akin to our current city 311 line. This would be an information clearinghouse for all things pertaining to RPS on the district level. Parents want to know what is going on in their local school and the system as a whole.
3. Communication needs to be two-way. Parents need to be able to speak with their School Board representative to provide crucial

feedback -- not just at official meetings (which can be intimidating) but anytime. The School Board needs to have more informal sessions with the public. **My cell phone number and physical address will be public information.** I will be available to anyone who needs to be heard.

4. RPS needs to **communicate through its own website** and through community websites such as Church Hill People News (CHNP.net), Greater Fulton News (greaterfultonnews.org).

Schools

Problem – Practical needs exist in the classroom which the current system cannot supply quickly and efficiently.

Solution

1. In some communities, teachers **post a ‘wish list’ on the internet** which is accessible by all members of the community. These ‘wishes’ may include classroom supplies or specific instructional help (e.g., new text books, reading coaches). Once ours is established, we will solicit help from local business and individual donors to fill these wishes.
2. According to the National Education Association one of the leading reasons given for teachers departures is “too little support”. That support and appreciation needs to be modeled by the School Board and encouraged in the community. **Teacher Appreciation Teams**, made up of School Board officials and community members, would have the single mission of showing teachers that they are respected, supported and vital members of our City.
3. Finally we should not just measure schools by SOL scores, but rather by a more thorough method. I propose a **School Health Checkup** to include teacher retention, graduation rates, and PTA involvement.

Community Resources

Problem – Education can seem disconnected from a child’s future. The community feels disassociated from schools in the neighborhood.

Solution

1. Community efforts can encourage children that school is completely connected to their future. These efforts help students to understand how education applies to family, work and their own identity. **Promoting after-school programs** like Art 180, CHAT (Church Hill Activities and tutoring), and Micah Initiative will give great help to students experiencing trouble in the school environment. After-school programs in Chicago and L.A. report:
75% of the children liked school more after attending the program

30 of 40 participating schools experienced gains in student reading scores

39 of 40 schools showed gains in math scores

2. Establish **bus routes** to local Boys and Girls clubs or RPS sponsored After-School Programs
3. Hold an occasional **After-School activity fair** where community organizations come to describe their programs. Parents will appreciate the opportunity to enroll their children in these rich and varied programs.

We also want to assist individual members of the communities to connect with their schools through community programs or through the PTA. Information about programs working in area schools should be readily available on the RPS website with contact information describing how to get involved.

Together we can produce good citizens and the next generation of civic leaders

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