



OUR COMMUNITY OUR FUTURE

THE ROLE OF CITIZENS IN
SOLVING THE HIGH SCHOOL
DROPOUT PROBLEM



THE DAVID MATHEWS CENTER FOR CIVIC LIFE

is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization that works with citizens who want to make positive, innovative decisions that lead to action in their communities on issues that concern them. The Center works to encourage sustainable community practices that are aimed at building and preserving a healthy democracy. We do this through signature programs such as Alabama Issues Forums, Teachers' Institute, Citizens' Congress, and Coaching Community Innovation Workshops. We take a non-advocacy, non-partisan approach to facilitating the important work that citizens must do to maintain a civic environment that promotes engagement. The Center honors the life and work of David Mathews, a native of Grove Hill, Alabama and acting president and CEO of the Kettering Foundation in Dayton, Ohio. Our offices are housed at the American Village in Montevallo, Alabama, because we share their passion for educating the next generation of citizens.

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Forward

Dear Fellow Citizens,

Welcome to “*Our Community, Our Future: The Role of Citizens in Solving the High School Dropout Situation.*” Citizens of Alabama have responded enthusiastically to opportunities to talk through and begin making decisions about dropout challenges in our state. As you will see in the following report from the Alabama Issues Forums, approximately 1,000 citizens of Alabama in 30 counties have participated in 40 forums. Alabama Issues Forums is a signature program of the David Mathews Center for Civic Life. Our motto is “what would work better in our communities, if we worked better together?”

“the primary impetus for effective education of young people and your future in your community is you.”

A report from as extensive an effort as this year’s AIF focus on the dropout challenge invariably has lots of stories, numerous emerging themes, and lots of supporting data. Amid all the facts, don’t miss the chemistry. What makes a report of this sort useful is what is happening in communities as a result of participating in the activities that produced the report. As effective decision-making forums demonstrate, more sustainable decisions come from diverse groups working through the strengths and weaknesses of all possible approaches. Statewide reports aggregate conversations in many different locales. Decision-making about dropout

challenges indeed involves some institutional actions at state and federal levels. But the primary impetus for effective education of young people and your future in your community is you.

Read the report. Digest the report. Talk through the choices your community must make. Keep weighing the costs, consequences, and tradeoffs of possible approaches in your community. Work together. Take action together. Learn together. Make necessary corrections. Keep going.

Sincerely,



Robert H. McKenzie

President and Chief Executive Officer

Executive Summary

by **CHRIS McCAULEY**
Executive Director

As the David Mathews Center for Civic Life prepared for Alabama Issues Forums (AIF) 2010-2011, we frequently asked Alabamians the following question: What are a couple of things in your community that people should come together to address? Center staff and interns asked this question in parking lots, public forums, street corners, civic events, and on the Ask Alabama Poll.¹ The responses varied greatly, but one issue was cited more frequently than any other: the dropout situation in Alabama.

According to the Southern Education Foundation, students’ dropping out of school is Alabama’s “number one obstacle to sustained economic growth, expansion, and well-being.”² Considering the current economic climate in the state (as well as in the nation), it is not altogether surprising to see that Alabamians are concerned with improving education and preventing students from dropping out of school.

The Center decided to further engage the public’s interest in the issue by organizing a “Citizens’ Congress” on June 23, 2010 at the American Village in Montevallo. We invited citizens from across the state to help us think through the dropout situation and assist us in developing an effective decision-making tool for AIF 2010- 2011.

Altogether, 170 Alabamians participated in the Congress. Groups that were in attendance included the Birmingham Council of PTAs, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Legacy Youth Leadership Program, A.G. Gaston Boys and Girls Club Southside Homes Unit, and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Dr. Kay Atchison Warfield of the Alabama State Department of Education provided a presentation on the state’s dropout realities, while table facilitators worked with participants to answer and reflect on questions related to the issue.

Using the information gathered from Citizens’ Congress, the Mathews Center developed an issue map entitled “Dropouts: What Should We Do?” Several collaborators contributed to the framework, acknowledged on the inside cover of the publication.

“Dropouts: What Should We Do?” does not advocate a particular approach to dropout prevention. Instead, it outlines the following three approaches

to the issue: Emphasize Achievement, Emphasize Preventative and Corrective School Programs, and Emphasize Community Responsibility. Each approach includes a brief narrative introduction, a list of examples of what might be done, and a list of consequences to consider.

The purpose of “Dropouts: What Should We Do?” is to prompt deliberation in public forums. In using the publication, interested citizens are asked to think through tradeoffs, costs, and consequences, while also actively listening to differing perspectives on the issues.

During AIF 2010-2011, local conveners in 30 counties organized a total of 40 deliberative forums using “Dropouts: What Should We Do?” as a foundation for discussions. The Mathews Center provided neutral moderators and recorders at every forum, and the deliberations were tediously recorded. Post-forum questionnaires were distributed at the end of each deliberative experience.

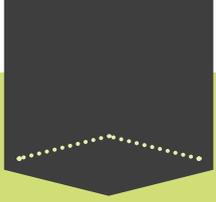
Guided by forum observations, recordings, and questionnaires, the Mathews Center authored this comprehensive report on AIF 2010-2011. Our staff has worked diligently to identify common ground within the three approaches, to expound on seven emerging themes in dropout prevention, and to acknowledge exciting moments in democratic action – including an event entitled “Making Community Decisions About Alabama’s Dropout Situation.”

We hope that by reading this report, citizens will see that civic engagement is alive and well in Alabama. For the duration of a year, people across the state deliberated, made decisions, and took action on issues surrounding the dropout situation – work that can be classified as both difficult and rewarding.

Alabamians are engaged and willing to take ownership of public issues, and the Mathews Center is excited to illustrate how such engagement and ownership emerged through its forums on the dropout situation in Alabama.

¹ The Ask Alabama Poll is distributed by the Center for Governmental Services at Auburn University.

² Southern Education Foundation, Atlanta, GA (2008) – “High School Dropouts: Alabama’s Number One Education and Economic Problem.”



OUR COMMUNITY OUR FUTURE

THE ROLE OF CITIZENS IN SOLVING THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT PROBLEM

“It’s important to get an education.”

Conversations in each forum uncovered different facets and tensions of the dropout issue, but all deliberated through the same three-approach framework contained in *Dropouts: What Should We Do?* Notwithstanding wide demographic and geographic diversity, citizens across Alabama arrived at similar assessments of the three approaches.

1

EMPHASIZE ACHIEVEMENT

Approach One, Emphasize Achievement, stresses setting high academic standards that can be measured along with focusing energy on disciplined students who strive for success. Four-year college attendance and global competitiveness in the areas of math, science, and technology are underscored by Approach One, which places responsibility upon the individual student and defines achievement through standardized test scores.

A number of forum participants agreed with Approach One's recommendations. "We definitely need to emphasize achievement...we're running to mediocrity rather than challenging every student where they are," related a citizen in Chatham. Others highlighted the global impact for the U.S. of not emphasizing achievement: "The United States is falling way behind," averred a participant in Oak Grove. A high-school student in Wilton conveyed that when achievement and competition are emphasized, students "put forth more effort."

Notwithstanding support from a number of individuals, the majority of forum participants challenged the premise of Approach One. These participants agreed that high achievers ought to be challenged, but countered that social costs are too high to neglect those who cannot compete at the same level. Many asked different versions of the same question: "What about the other kids? Are they just throwaways?" Overall, AIF participants were not willing to overlook those students who achieve in unique ways, which could be the result of efforts concentrating only on high achievers.

Forum participants questioned how to define achievement within the first few minutes of deliberation in every forum. Most citizens articulated that exclusively preparing students to achieve higher test scores does not beget productive members of society. Individualizing achievement and pursuing a more holistic approach to defining success dominated much of the deliberation on Approach One. Participants particularly wished to see the definition of achievement encompass college *and* career readiness.

EMPHASIZE PREVENTATIVE & CORRECTIVE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

2

Approach Two, Emphasize Preventative and Corrective School Programs, calls attention to students in need of assistance. It advocates a number of school programs—including early intervention, literacy, extracurricular, career and vocational—to address the needs and abilities of all students. In addition, it highlights the impact of students' home lives and backgrounds upon their performances in school, and places responsibility on schools to address resultant deficiencies.

Approach Two resonated with many forum participants, who felt that it "takes into account that one size does not fit all." In fact, 77.5%* of post-forum questionnaire respondents feel to a degree that "we should implement more dropout prevention and rehabilitation programs EVEN IF they take time and personnel and monetary resources away from programs that emphasize individual academic achievement." While programs already in place and those that participants would like to see implemented formed a portion of the conversation around Approach Two, the role of students' home lives galvanized deliberation in a significant number of forums. A citizen from Blount County summed up a recurring concern: "Children, when they first come to school, come from a myriad of different experiences. Many of them don't have the advantages of other kids, and you can't expect the same things on the same timetable...you've got to give children what they need to nurture them." According to many forum participants, students' backgrounds and home lives must be understood, and their physical needs alleviated, before their academic potentials can be reached.

Forum participants grappled with the tradeoffs of greater financial costs to taxpayers and heavier workloads for schools inherent in Approach Two. According to several forum participants, schools and teachers do not have the time, the resources, and, often, the expertise to address all of a student's needs. A Hayneville forum participant expressed the feelings of many in questioning the feasibility of asking educators "to be miracle workers."

*The full set of results can be found on pages 20–21

3

EMPHASIZE COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

Approach Three, “Emphasize Community Responsibility,” presupposes that not every student has a supportive home environment, that schools cannot meet each student’s needs, and that it is the community’s responsibility to serve “as a bridge” between the two. Approach Three asks communities to think creatively about their underutilized resources, which might include libraries, museums, senior citizens, businesses, and faith-based communities to provide mentoring programs, tutors, arts programs, literacy initiatives, early childhood education opportunities, and other programs to bolster the instruction children receive at home and school.

Many forum participants expressed support for Approach Three, citing the social and financial cost to their communities if students continue dropping out. Reliance upon government assistance programs, incarceration, and a diminished tax base mean that “society is still responsible,” in many cases, for dropouts long after their abbreviated attendance in school, according to a forum participant at Stillman College. During deliberation over Approach Three, many forums shifted from discussing the nebulous “they” to the clear and immediate “we.” One forum participant in Camden echoed the sentiments of many, stating, “I have a responsibility as a citizen.” Statements such as this one often led to the culmination of the forum’s deliberations, as citizens made commitments to act publicly and shared ways in which their views on the dropout issue had changed.

As with the other approaches, forum participants weighed the tradeoffs intrinsic to Approach Three. The amount of time, and money, necessary to organize and implement many community-based initiatives arose in nearly every forum. However, less than eight percent of post-forum questionnaire respondents expressed that community-based solutions should not be pursued due to the “time and personnel and monetary costs for me and my fellow citizens.” A few forum participants also expressed concern that community-based programs might tend toward unequal distribution. One forum participant in Jasper related the potential challenges of orchestrating a community-led program “in a society where you might not know your neighbors.” In spite of the tradeoffs and challenges, most forum participants concurred with a Camden forum participant: “I really don’t think we can emphasize [the community’s role] enough.”



Common Themes:

NO TWO DROPOUT-FORUM CONVERSATIONS LOOKED THE SAME, AS EACH COMMUNITY UNCOVERED TENSIONS AND DEALT WITH TRADEOFFS. **HOWEVER, 7 MAJOR THEMES EMERGED FROM DELIBERATIONS THROUGH THE THREE APPROACHES. THESE COMMON THREADS, WHEN WOVEN TOGETHER, REVEAL A STATEWIDE CONVERSATION WITH CROSS-DEMOGRAPHIC AGREEMENT ON SEVERAL KEY STRANDS OF THE DROPOUT ISSUE IN ALABAMA.**

Defining Achievement

“What is the definition of achievement?” emerged almost immediately as a foundational query in every forum. A majority of forum participants professed discomfort with defining achievement primarily based on standardized test scores. Twenty-six percent of respondents on the post-forum questionnaire indicated strong disagreement with using standardized academic achievement tests to define achievement, while 26% expressed a slightly lower level of disagreement. Many felt that emphasizing achievement on standardized tests “leaves little time for creative curriculum.”

“Standards without support do not equal success,” said a citizen in Wilton on the inadequacies of relying upon test scores to define achievement. Many concurred with a Camden citizen’s view that “we need to figure out a way for all children to succeed in some area.” As an alternative to emphasizing standardized testing, forum participants suggested a more individualized and holistic approach to defining achievement. Citizens particularly felt that achievement could be individualized by expanding career preparation programs and adding more guidance counselors—both professional and lay community members. “Achievement for you,” related a citizen in Hayneville, “might be something totally different from achievement for me,” due to different learning styles, needs, and backgrounds.

Most forums drew attention to the need for a good work ethic and academic competence due to the harsh realities of competing for and retaining jobs for the community. One forum participant from Oak Grove bemoaned, “I’ve had [high school graduates] come to me for employment that can’t fill out a job application” due to incredibly low reading comprehension. Lowering standards, according to forum participants, is not the alternative in moving away from defining achievement by test scores, but rather shifting the emphasis to support systems and individualized definitions of achievement.

Home Life & Parental Involvement

Academic performance according to nearly all forum participants, “starts in the home.” These participants continually highlighted the challenging home situations of students, the potentially debilitating effects of home situations on students’ ability to reach their academic potential, and the need for the community and educators to respond. Echoing the feelings of many, a Ft. Payne forum participant opined that “If we followed those students home in the afternoon, we would marvel not at how bad they were, we would marvel at how good they were, considering their circumstances.” Many students, according to forum participants, are “worried about this week,” about basic issues of survival, leaving such students little time and energy to examine the future implications of their academic decisions.

Forum participants expressed particular concern for students who have no parents, who come from single-parent households, or who have parents who cannot or will not aid and encourage their children academically. “A lot of our parents aren’t equipped educationally to assist their children,” remarked a Hayneville citizen. Some parents, according to forum participants, show no interest in their children’s academic achievement, resulting in students who “can’t count on getting that support at home.” Unfortunately, “a lot of parents... just don’t know how to parent,” leaving gaps for the child academically between the home and the classroom.

Dropout forum participants proposed several initiatives to involve reluctant parents and develop their latent parenting skills. Community after-school program coordinators in Camden talked of requiring parents to assist once a week with the programs their children are involved with, while the staff simultaneously try to “make [the parents] feel a part of the program.” Several communities suggested hosting orientations for parents before the commencement of school terms and programs in order to encourage further parental involvement. Though most forum participants expressed that there is no replacement for loving, caring parents, one asserted that “it’s our responsibility [as a community] to see how we can fill in some of [the] gaps.”

A Culture that Values Education

A large number of forums brought up the importance of students’ having homes and cultures that value education. Parents, according to a forum participant in Tarrant, “have to know and model the importance of education for their kids.” Students who are not stimulated academically and encouraged to do their utmost outside of school, in the opinion of forum participants, have a greater hurdle to jump upon entering the school doors, due to conflicting messages from their family or community members or peers. “How do I fight [those conflicting messages]?” queried a teacher in Monroeville.

We “have to make [education] relevant” to the students, observed a Montgomery citizen, in order to combat a culture that often appears to not value education. A Ft. Payne participant captured the opinions of many: “A lot of students do not realize why they need math, and why they need English...they really don’t see the connect[ion] to the real world, to the jobs.” Relevancy, according to a number of communities, consists of uncovering the relationships between education and students real-life environments, hopes, and aspirations. Once again, tailoring goals and strategies to meet individual students needs and situations proved to be the preferred policy.

Career Readiness

Career readiness programs and ideas generated the most excitement in nearly every forum, spawning a profusion of ideas around the state. A prodigious 97% of post-forum questionnaire respondents expressed that “we should expand career tech opportunities for students.” Summing up the viewpoints of nearly all forum participants, a citizen in Blount County remarked, “We cannot assume that every student is going to go to [a four-year] college.”

Citizens gravitated toward emphasizing career readiness due to the fact that such an emphasis reflects the economic situations of most communities and provides both relevancy and opportunities for individualizing student achievement. A citizen in Decatur forecasted the stark economic reality of unproductive students on a community: “The ones that are not performing well in school...they’re not going anywhere.... That’s your community of the future.” In other words, a large number of students unprepared for the workforce represents a significant and preventable material drain on the resources of the community. Career education additionally provides the relevant “connection between why I have to go to school every day and the fact that I’m going to need a job when I get out of school.” Furthermore, career education provides students, according to forum participants, with the opportunity to adapt



their educational experiences to specific goals for their lives, thus individualizing achievement.

In a number of communities, citizens would like to see their vocational and technical programs brought back or expanded. Many communities would like to see their county’s vocational programs augmented by cooperation with local Chambers of Commerce, two-year colleges, and industries. Citizens also have ideas about working with local businesses and industry to prepare young people for local jobs. Many feel that for communities to successfully prepare young people for gainful employment, “it’s going to take something between industry and the school system.”

Early Intervention

In addition to career readiness programs, early education initiatives also were supported by a large number of forum participants. “Children don’t actually drop out in high school,” stated a citizen in Ft. Payne. “They drop out in kindergarten and hang around to make it official.” In Phenix City, a forum participant encouraged the community to “invest early, so you don’t have to pay so much in the end.” Specifically, citizens in several communities would like to see reading and math interventionists in every school. A participant in Cullman suggested that interventionists and programs ought to target the students whose achievement levels are just above the passing threshold, due to their risk for dropping below that mark.



Community Involvement

Community involvement, according to forum participants, is vital to lowering the dropout rate in the state. If “there’s only so much [teachers] can do,” and “Mom can only help so much,” why can’t the community step in? probed many Alabamians. When asked, “What will you do to address the dropout situation?” a sizable portion of post-forum questionnaire respondents replied with plans for community-based solutions and for involving themselves in pre-existing community initiatives. Regardless of how citizens would like to see the community involved in staunching the flow of dropouts in Alabama, every community seemed convinced that “it takes a village” and not a simplistic “band aid” solution to remedy the problem.

According to forum participants, the goal of community involvement is to create a mutually supportive “symbiotic relationship” between the school and the community. One educator in Cullman opined that “We’ve kind of built walls around the school and pretty much told the community to stay out.” After toppling any barriers between the community and the school, forum participants would like their communities to grow in “wrapping services around the child” so that every student receives the necessary support to become a productive member of society.

Wrap-Around Support

The moment of greatest excitement in many forums occurred when citizens began to discuss actions they could take to provide community-based programs and initiatives to address their concerns from career readiness to parental involvement. A documentary about the dropout issue produced by students at Phenix City’s Center High School and a brochure detailing the dropout situation in Dothan emerged from moments such as these.

In addition to engendering new initiatives, forum participants sought ways to expand existing community programs and to harness underutilized resources. Over ninety-one percent of post-forum questionnaire respondents agreed that “Our civic and voluntary organizations should make dropout prevention and rehabilitation programs a primary emphasis in their efforts to serve the community and support schools.” Several communities expressed a desire to expand their Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPO) programs, others wanted to foster initiatives through the local Chambers of Commerce and libraries, and still others wished to see increased avenues for senior citizens to mentor students. Many forum participants communicated that churches and faith-based groups are a “big untapped resource” within their communities. Churches “want to help,” remarked a citizen in Blount County, and if “we, as a school, can reach out to them, they’ll put back into our schools.”

Forum participants see mentoring programs as the single greatest means for communities to inspire the high school graduation of a larger percentage of its students. From bolstering an existing church mentoring program in south Shelby County to ideas from the Bibb County Youth Leadership group to bring community members into the high school to serve as guidance counselors, groups of citizens throughout Alabama expressed enthusiasm for an array of avenues to provide much-needed role models and mentors to students in their communities. Furthermore, numerous post-forum questionnaire respondents expressed a desire to serve as mentors for students in all grades.

Final Conclusions:

Alabamians have much to say about the dropout issue. However, the primary goal of deliberation is not for citizens simply to relate their opinions, but rather to weigh choices and make commitments to act publicly.

Numerous Alabama citizens, as a result of this forum series, are doing just that. Though admitting that the reasons for the dropout rate are “so many and so complex,” forum participants exhibited no timidity in taking action in their communities. For example, some communities expressed that “We need to have more conversations on this topic.” Other communities made commitments to act publicly on a particular project or initiative, as in the cases of Phenix City and Dothan.

For many citizens, participating in a community forum for the first time proved to be eye opening. “I think, sometimes, people have to be more proactive in sharing what they know instead of waiting for people to come to them,” related a forum participant in Wilton. Post-forum questionnaire respondents reflected that enterprising attitude when answering the question “What can you do to address the dropout situation?” Responses ranged from “facilitate meetings between educators and the industrial community to help with job placement” to “volunteer to mentor a 6th grader whose reading skills are limiting her school performance.”

The examples in this document reveal that Alabamians approach their vital role as citizens with great creativity, dedication, and earnestness.

In order to connect the energy of those communities whose citizens have implemented their commitments to act publicly with those who are unsure how to move from talk to action, the Mathews Center, along with Auburn University’s College of Liberal Arts and the University of Alabama’s New College, sponsored an event entitled “Making Community Decisions About Alabama’s Dropout Situation.” “Making Community Decisions” provided an opportunity for the Center to facilitate further conversations amongst the numerous communities whose constituents have participated in dropout forums. The highly interactive gathering allowed citizens and communities to engage with seventeen community-based groups intent upon eliminating the dropout rate and improving education.

“I think, sometimes, people have to be more proactive in sharing what they know instead of waiting for people to come to them...”

DURING THE EVENT, FORUM PARTICIPANTS FROM AROUND THE STATE WERE ABLE TO SHARE THEIR PLANS WITH ONE ANOTHER, EXPLORE IDEAS, AND PROPOSE ANSWERS TO THE LOOMING QUESTION: “WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?” 

On June 22, 2011, OVER 100 CITIZENS ATTENDED

Making Community Decisions

About Alabama's Dropout Situation,

a unique event held at Auburn University Montgomery, sponsored by the Mathews Center and co-sponsored by The University of Alabama's New College and Auburn University's College of Liberal Arts.

One benefit of working with citizens around the state through Alabama Issues Forums is learning about innovative and successful programs and projects that embody the principles of democracy in action. More often than not, these successful initiatives began when citizens saw a need, joined with others who shared the same feeling that something ought to be done, decided a course of action, and encouraged others to join them on the journey.

Representatives from seventeen of these community-based organizations prepared eight-minute summaries of their organizations' work. In a style that resembled a session of speed dating, attendees chose an organization's table, listened attentively, and then quickly moved to another table when the bell sounded and a recorded statement from an Alabama Issues Forum participant was played. Contact information for each organization was listed in the workshop handbook, and attendees were encouraged to learn even more about organizations during lunch and breaks.

The Mathews Center does not advocate for any particular solution to any public problem, believing that the role of citizens is to deliberate and decide on courses of action. An overreliance on experts and a general disdain for institutional politics has made some Alabamians feel weak and disinterested in community problem-solving; however the seventeen organizations that shared their stories over and over on June 22 proved that citizens do have the capacity and willingness to put innovative ideas to work.

Yes We Can! Dothan, for example, shared how its members have convened community conversations on education in order to form a unified voice and vision for the Dothan City Schools and the children and families it serves. Their work was inspired by another presenting organization, the Mobile Area Education Foundation, whose mission is to build community responsibility for improving educational outcomes. The Montgomery Education Foundation brought their popular yard signs that read "Believe It. We Believe...Better Schools, Better Montgomery." The Blount County Education

Foundation shared its experience with working cooperatively with the Blount County school system.

A number of small non-profit organizations shared their methods for making large contributions to their communities. Among these organizations are the Hale Empowerment and Revitalization Organization, the Hope House, First Teacher @home, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Lee County, Sylacauga Alliance for Family Enhancement, I Am My Brother's Keeper, and Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church's youth mentoring program.

Additional organizations that shared their experiences include the Decatur Quality Education Task Force, Information Transport Solutions, Alabama Poverty Project, Northeast Alabama Community College, and Winterboro High School.

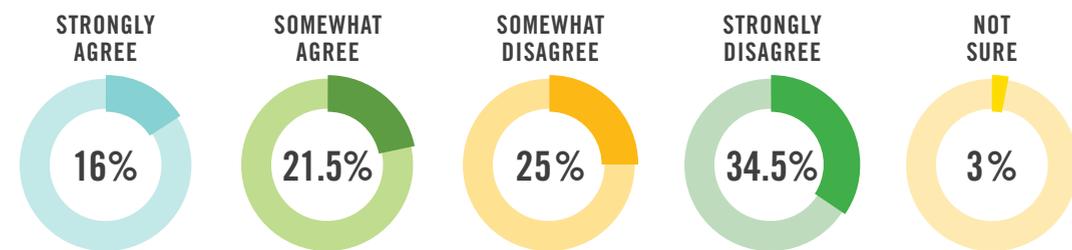
Dr. Tommy Bice, Assistant State Superintendent of the Alabama State Department of Education, updated attendees on programs and practices that support and encourage high school completion. He announced that Alabama was recently recognized by the United States Department of Education for advances through the Alabama Reading Initiative, and he discussed the role of technology in identifying and tracking students who show characteristics associated with dropping out--such as failing grades, absenteeism, and discipline issues.

After an opportunity to follow up on conversations begun around tables during the learning exchange, attendees had the opportunity to tour The Choice Bus, an experience-based learning tool created by the Mattie C. Stewart Foundation of Birmingham. The bus contains a full-scale replica jail cell, hidden behind a curtain and flat screen television. Students who tour the bus view stories of real prisoners discussing their regrets related to dropping out, view firsthand the uncomfortable living conditions of prison, and exit to receive a pledge card asking for their commitment to complete school and make good choices. The Choice Bus visits schools in Alabama and around the nation.

Questionnaire RESULTS:

We worked with local organizations and civic groups to convene and moderate 40 dropout forums with approximately 1,000 Alabamians during the 2010 – 2011 AIF project cycle. At the end of every deliberation, participants completed a post-forum questionnaire, which includes a mixture of close-ended and open-ended questions. The following summarizes post-forum questionnaire responses completed by approximately 750 forum participants:

We should place greater emphasis on individual academic achievement **EVEN IF** it results in a higher dropout rate among those who don't think they can compete with our school's definition of academic achievement.



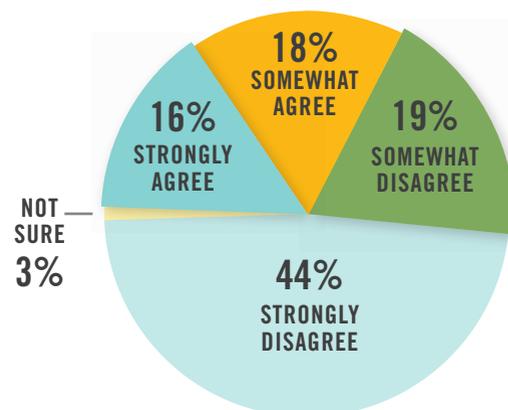
We should use quantitative, standardized tests to judge individual academic achievement in all subject areas.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 16% | Strongly Agree |
| 29.5% | Somewhat Agree |
| 26% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 26% | Strongly Disagree |
| 2.5% | Not Sure |

We should define academic achievement in terms of how well individual students can compete in a global economy in the areas of math, science, and technology.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 22% | Strongly Agree |
| 43% | Somewhat Agree |
| 21% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 11.5% | Strongly Disagree |
| 2.5% | Not Sure |

We are spending enough money on our schools, and we should learn to manage what we have more effectively.



We should implement more dropout prevention and rehabilitation programs **EVEN IF** they take time and personnel and monetary resources away from programs that emphasize individual academic achievement.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 37% | Strongly Agree |
| 40.5% | Somewhat Agree |
| 14% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 5.25% | Strongly Disagree |
| 3.25% | Not Sure |

We should expand career tech opportunities for students.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 80% | Strongly Agree |
| 17% | Somewhat Agree |
| 1.5% | Somewhat Disagree |
| <0.5% | Strongly Disagree |
| 1% | Not Sure |

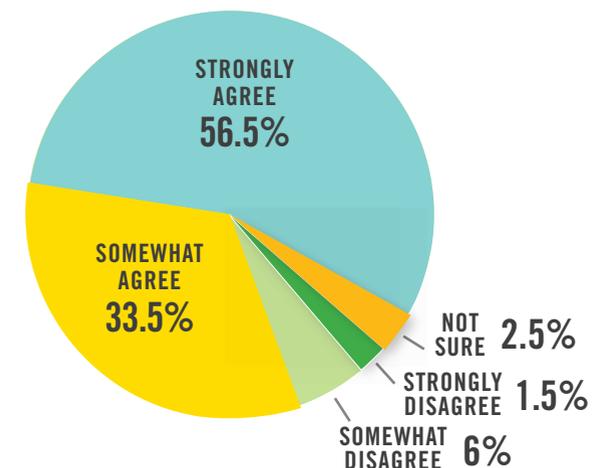
We should create opportunities for students who have dropped out to reenroll and complete a standard high school diploma

| | |
|--------|-------------------|
| 70.75% | Strongly Agree |
| 23.5% | Somewhat Agree |
| 3% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 1.75% | Strongly Disagree |
| 1% | Not Sure |

We should implement programs that encourage academic flexibility through out-of-school educational opportunities.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 61% | Strongly Agree |
| 32.5% | Somewhat Agree |
| 3% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 1.5% | Strongly Disagree |
| 2% | Not Sure |

We should develop more community programs to deal with situations that affect increasing dropout rates by supplementing school efforts **EVEN IF** they require more time and personnel and monetary costs for me and my fellow citizens.



Our civic and voluntary organizations should make dropout prevention and rehabilitation programs a primary emphasis in their efforts to serve the community and support schools.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 57.5% | Strongly Agree |
| 34% | Somewhat Agree |
| 4.5% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 1% | Strongly Disagree |
| 3% | Not Sure |

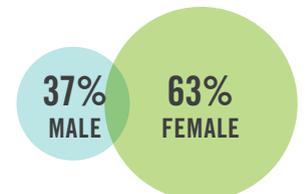
Our community programs should be open to young people of all backgrounds and socio-economic levels.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 89% | Strongly Agree |
| 9% | Somewhat Agree |
| 1% | Somewhat Disagree |
| <0.5% | Strongly Disagree |
| <0.5% | Not Sure |

Our community civic clubs and voluntary organizations should enable young people who lack financial resources to have full participation in their dropout prevention and rehabilitation efforts.

| | |
|-------|-------------------|
| 75.5% | Strongly Agree |
| 19.5% | Somewhat Agree |
| 2% | Somewhat Disagree |
| 1% | Strongly Disagree |
| 2% | Not Sure |

Are you male or female?



How old are you?

| | |
|-------|---------------|
| 15% | 17 or younger |
| 16.5% | 18-30 |
| 20.5% | 31-45 |
| 39.5% | 45-64 |
| 8.5% | 65 or older |

Are you:

| | |
|-------|------------------|
| 43.5% | African-American |
| <0.5% | Asian American |
| <0.5% | Hispanic |
| 1.5% | Native American |
| 53% | White/Caucasian |
| 1% | Other |

Community Partners:

THANK YOU ALL FOR
YOUR DEDICATION
TO COMMUNITY AND
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
IN ALABAMA!

Throughout AIF 2010 – 2011, the David Mathews Center for Civic Life worked with the following organizations and civic groups to convene and moderate 40 public forums in 30 counties using the issue guide “Dropouts: What Should We Do?”

MADISON COUNTY

Huntsville-Madison County Public Library

MORGAN COUNTY

Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce
Decatur Quality Education Task Force

CULLMAN COUNTY

Cullman City Board of Education
Cullman City Schools

BALDWIN COUNTY

Orange Beach Public Library

DEKALB COUNTY

Ft. Payne Career Center

BLOUNT COUNTY

Limestone Springs Country Club
Blount County Education Foundation

WALKER COUNTY

Walker County Cooperative Extension
Walker County Chamber of Commerce
Senator Greg Reed

JEFFERSON COUNTY

Five Points West Regional Branch Library
Birmingham National Issues Forums

Southside Baptist Church
Alabama Poverty Project

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY

Stillman College
University of Alabama
New College

ST. CLAIR COUNTY

Vincent First United Methodist Church

CALHOUN COUNTY

Anniston Parks and Recreation
Carver Community Center
Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama

TALLADEGA COUNTY

Oak Grove Town Hall
Town of Oak Grove

SHELBY COUNTY

Montevallo Public Library

American Village
*National Issues Forums in the
Classroom Teachers' Institute*

Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church

Youth Mentoring Program
University of Montevallo

BIBB COUNTY

Bill Taylor Institute at Mercedes
Bibb County Youth Leadership

Bill Taylor Institute at Mercedes
Bibb County Adult Leadership

TALLAPOOSA COUNTY

Dadeville High School
Auburn University

CHAMBERS COUNTY

Valley Community Center
Valley High School Key Club

LEE COUNTY

Drake Middle School
PEARLS Afterschool Program

MACON COUNTY

Tuskegee Public Housing
Tuskegee Youth Safehaven

ELMORE COUNTY

Elmore Correctional Facility
Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project

Staton Correctional Facility

Alabama Prison Arts + Education Project

MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Alabama State Council on the Arts
*Caroline Marshall Draughon Center
for the Arts and Humanities*

DALLAS COUNTY

Wallace State Community College-Selma
Dallas County Cooperative Extension

WILCOX COUNTY

Wilcox County Courthouse
Wilcox Cooperative Extension

CLARKE COUNTY

Thomasville Civic Center
Clarke County Promise Alliance

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Washington County Public Library
*Washington County Chamber
of Commerce*
Washington County Public Library

MONROE COUNTY

Monroeville Water Works Conference
Center
*Monroeville/Monroe County Cham-
ber of Commerce*

LOWNDES COUNTY

Hayneville Middle School
*Lowndes County Cooperative
Extension*

COFFEE COUNTY

County Complex
Coffee County Youth Leadership

HOUSTON COUNTY

Wiregrass Foundation
Yes We Can! Dothan

RUSSELL COUNTY

Central High School, Phenix City
Future Problem Solvers
Russell County Chamber of Commerce

Russell County Jail

J.O.Y. Behind Bars

MARSHALL COUNTY

Arab High School

WHAT CAN CITIZENS IN YOUR COMMUNITY DO TO
ADDRESS THE DROPOUT SITUATION IN ALABAMA?

Continue the conversation at mathewscenter.org