

Promises to Keep

Charleston, West Virginia

Charleston Civic Center

July 14, 2009

West Virginia High School Graduation and Dropout Prevention Summit



Sponsored by:

West Virginia Department of Education & the Arts
America's Promise Alliance
State Farm Insurance
Gear Up West Virginia
Volunteer West Virginia
West Virginia Center for Civic Life
West Virginia's Promise
The Educational Alliance
West Virginia Prevention Resource Center
Mountaineer Challenge Academy
Junior Achievement
West Virginia Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health



Speakers:

Governor Joe Manchin III
First Lady Gayle Conelly Manchin
Richard Wells
Dr. Steven L. Paine
Pamela Dugan
Dr. Marjorie Darrah
Betty Knighton
Kindra Boyd
Jacob "Jake" Bailes
Whitney Stewart
Timothy Stephen Duncan



Summit Overview

A common interest in helping West Virginia students succeed in school brought over 250 people from all regions of the state to the Charleston Civic Center on July 14, 2009. They were students and teachers, citizens and elected officials, parents, and grandparents. For four hours, they listened to one another, shared their ideas, and articulated their hopes for the children and youth of West Virginia.

They brought with them experiences in volunteer service, education, business, government, faith groups, civic organizations, and private foundations.



They came to examine these questions together:

- Why do students in West Virginia drop out of school?
- What can be done to prevent students from dropping out?
- What are the best practices for helping students stay in school?

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The West Virginia High School Graduation and Dropout Prevention Summit built upon months of work and the contributions of hundreds of West Virginia citizens in eight regional dropout prevention summits held throughout the state in the spring of 2009.



As participants in the state summit examined their own beliefs and learned from each other, they shared rich insights into a wide range of interconnected areas affecting students' success:

- Effective parenting practices
- Appropriate community support
- Strong educational practices
- Responsive public policies

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Key Themes from the State Summit



West Virginia students will benefit from a more coordinated approach to meeting their needs—from parents, schools, communities, service agencies, and local and state policies.

Most of the summit participants could cite numerous examples of what one attendee called “good efforts by good people.” They praised the effectiveness of many individuals and programs in addressing the needs of West Virginia students. However, they felt that these efforts often take place in isolation from each other. They believed strongly that support for students would be greatly enhanced by a more concerted effort to build connections among the many school and community-based programs in the state in a way that encourages more responsive individual efforts and state policies.

West Virginia students will benefit from flexible, adaptive environments that address their individual needs.

In the words of one summit participant, “The reasons students drop out of school are very personal, so the solutions have to be personal too.” While most summit participants agreed on many of the common needs of students, they acknowledged the wide range of individual, personal challenges that can stand in the way of student success. They emphasized that a “one-size-fits-all” approach to education will not meet the needs of many of West Virginia’s children and youth. They stressed that for some students, alternative learning environments and flexibility in course scheduling and completion timelines are the key to a successful educational experience.

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Key Themes from the State Summit

West Virginia students will benefit from early intervention services when they are struggling at home or in school.

Many summit participants were concerned that once a student is on the verge of a decision to leave school, personal and academic problems have reached a severe level, one that is much more difficult to address. They stressed the need for educational and social services that provide needed support to children from a very early age. As First Lady Gayle Manchin urged, “It’s really about prevention. We have to start with the children at the very youngest ages to intervene and tear down the barriers that are holding them back.”

West Virginia students will benefit from engaging educational practices in classrooms staffed by dedicated teachers who have access to strong, ongoing teacher training.

State summit participants were interested in supporting engaging and compelling educational practices. While they acknowledged that not all students will be equally interested in all subject areas, they stressed the value of approaches that encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning, involve parents in learning goals, and make connections to the larger community for enriching knowledge and experiences. They emphasized the need for early exposure to vocational and college experiences.



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Key Themes from the State Summit



West Virginia students will benefit from access to strong support to deal with mental and behavioral health issues, including problems with substance abuse.

Many summit participants recognized that students face a wide range of challenges beyond their academic life as they grow up—many which have a profound impact on their ability to succeed in school. Parents and teachers alike have observed the struggles of students coping with mental and behavioral health issues or dealing with alcohol or drug abuse. They stressed the need for high quality services—in schools and in communities—for students and their families.

In order to support West Virginia students, teachers need the support of parents and the community.

Throughout the summit, in table conversations among participants and in the comments from youth speakers who described their struggles to stay in school, the pivotal role of the classroom teacher was underscored. Participants expressed high expectations for teacher performance—in creating atmospheres that promote learning and healthy self-development. At the same time, they acknowledged the gargantuan task many of our state’s teachers face as they work to educate students within the context of their personal family circumstances and individual needs. Summit participants stressed the importance of all citizens to provide support to teachers in their efforts to educate West Virginia’s children and to share responsibility with them for student achievement.

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Listen to what they have to say!



Governor Joe Manchin III

“Education is a lifeline to everything that we do. A third of the country’s population is made up of children, but 100% of our future depends on them. We can’t afford to lose one-not one. We have to figure out how we can challenge them, how we can make education interesting to them.”

Governor Joe Manchin III

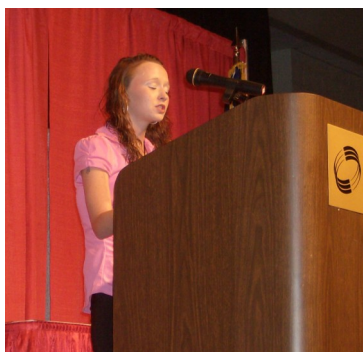
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Listen to what they have to say!



“This is not just a West Virginia problem. This is a national problem, but West Virginia can certainly be a leader. No one pulls together like West Virginians. Listening to our young people tonight, we know that we have the resiliency, and we have the strength, and we have the endurance...it’s really about prevention. We have to start with children at the very youngest ages to intervene and tear down the barriers that are holding them back.”

First Lady Gayle Manchin



“If I would have had the Five Promises in my life, things may have been different. I’ve had to overcome many challenges. In August when I start school, I will be the first person in my family to attend college.”

Kindra Boyd



“According to the statistics, I should never have graduated from high school, but I did. I have been raised around violence, drugs, and alcohol. I have been mentally, physically and sexually abused. During high school, I transferred schools 16 times. But I had a teacher who never gave up helping me. Students need positive encouragement from their teachers; there’s enough negativity from other students and the world.”

Whitney Stewart

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Listen to what they have to say!



“Education was not important to me. I often missed school and slept when I went to school. I didn't see the value in education, so I didn't try. At the Academy, I learned the importance of giving back to my community, and I participated in over 60 hours of community service. I learned the self-discipline I'll need to succeed in the world. “

Timothy Stephen Duncan



“I've had to mature a lot in the past four years due to the death of my parents. During my seventh grade year, I felt so betrayed and stressed out that I was beginning to think I wouldn't stay in school much longer. Having teachers and family members believing in me made a huge difference in my life, and now I'm doing much better. A smile or a kind word such as 'Hello, Jake, nice to see you today' could make a big difference in a student's school day.”

Jacob “Jake” Bailes



“In my story, there were people and events that helped me get back on my feet. They helped me see my potential when I didn't know I had any. Tonight I challenge you to think about what it takes to keep a child in school. The reasons students drop out are very personal, so the solutions have to be personal too... I want you to give the problem a student's name. I want you to see a face.”

Dr. Marjorie Darrah

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First Lady Gayle Manchin chatting with members of the State Summit in July 2009.



Governor Joe Manchin III discussing with members of the State Summit solutions to preventing dropouts in West Virginia.

Kindra Boyd with First Lady Gayle Manchin. Kindra was one of the student speakers at the July 2009 State Summit



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Moving Forward...

Moving forward in West Virginia

Early intervention

“We can’t wait until a student is overwhelmed and ready to quit. We have to try to prevent problems when we can and intervene early if they arise.”

--Summit participant

Summit participants agreed that the key to dropout prevention is providing help to students at early signs of difficulty in a wide range of areas, including academics, behavior, and health. They stressed the need for high quality preschool education, counseling services, tutoring, and truancy prevention. Many participants focused in particular on the need to provide extra support for students in their transitions from pre-K into elementary school, into the middle school years, and into high school.

Engaged community

“You don’t have to be an educator or a parent to open your eyes and see a child in need.”

-Summit participant

Summit participants often spoke of the need for shared responsibility for student success that goes beyond the home and school and into the broader community. They acknowledged the vital role that community members and organizations can play in supporting children and youth in after school and summer programs, in mentoring relationships, or as adult advocates. They emphasized that the challenges are too multi-faceted for schools to deal with on their own.

Flexible learning environments

“Not all students learn the same way. We need to do more to match the environment to their needs.”

--Summit participant

When summit participants expanded on the broad theme of flexibility within educational environments, they acknowledged that many students would benefit from options such as year-round school, alternative education centers, flexible school hours, and small group learning opportunities.

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Moving Forward...

Strong reading skills

“It’s all about the 3 R’s--reading, reading, and reading.”

--Summit participant

Summit participants supported a broad educational approach, but they put a special emphasis on the importance of helping students develop strong reading skills in the early grades. In addition to strong classroom practices, they indicated the need for parents to stress reading at home and for community members to serve as tutors for children who need extra one-on-one attention.

Career exploration/preparation

If students have a better idea of where their education can lead, they’ll be more motivated to work toward a personal goal.

--Summit participant

Many summit participants felt that students would benefit greatly by early exposure to career options through job shadowing, work study, and service-learning. They felt students would benefit from exposure to vocational education as well as higher education through dual/college credit courses while in high school.

Active, engaged learning environments

“Our children need teachers who fire up their curiosity, their attention, and their responsibility for their own learning.”

--Summit participant

Participants stressed the need for engaging, relevant educational experiences to capture students’ imagination and to build their commitment to their own learning. Many felt that the key to creating this type of learning environment is strong teacher preparation programs that emphasize creative use of technology, inclusion of the arts, and real-world, experiential learning.

Support services—mental, behavioral, health

“Some of our students face daunting challenges in their personal lives. We need to look at all of their needs—not just the academic ones.”

--Summit participant

Many summit participants expressed deep concern for the challenges students face in a wide range of areas that dramatically affect their ability to do well in school. They emphasized the importance of helping students who are dealing with health issues, substance abuse, unsupportive home environments, and financial burdens.

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Vital Statistics...

The Impact of High School Dropouts in West Virginia and the Nation

- * 6,500 West Virginia students did not graduate with their high school class in 2008.
- * Lost lifetime earnings for students who did not graduate with their 2008 class totals nearly \$1.7 billion.
- * Projections indicate 6,913 potential high school graduates will not receive a diploma in 2009.
- * Over the lifetime of students who dropout each year in the US, an extra \$55.3 million will be spent on their health care costs.
- * \$35.8 million in crime-related savings and additional revenue for West Virginia's economy could be realized each year if the male high school graduation rate increased by just 5%.

Sources: West Virginia-State Highlights 2009, Editorial Projects in Education Research Center or Alliance for Excellent Education, <http://www.all4ed.org/files/WestVirginia.pdf>



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The Five Promises

Caring Adults

Safe Places

Healthy Start

An Effective Education

Opportunities to Help Others

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We can help them accomplish this!