

Friends-We Present *Compass Points*
our newsletter

It is with great pleasure that we bring you our first newsletter for friends, partners and others who are interested at what the Collaborative is doing. Our goals for this newsletter are to provide commentary on issues related to education of at-promise youth (at-risk youth), bring you more information regarding our activities and to provide opportunities to learn about the activities of our friends and partners. We are not creating a set schedule for how often we publish *Compass Points*, instead when we think there is something worth commenting on we'll just speak our mind(s) about it. There is much going on right now concerning education for at-promise youth and, quite frankly, much of what we read, see and hear from policymakers is concerning. Our one real goal is to create a respectful dialog between all stakeholders regarding what is best for educating kids. We offer these comments with great optimism and we provide this with a sense of generosity. We hope this helps.

*International Alliance for
Invitational Education Conference*
October 26-29
Eastern Kentucky University
www.invitationaleducation.net
www.eku.edu

Reclaiming the Title

Embracing the Mission

Doing The Work

Rev. Charles K. Miller, President and
Co-founder

*Trust-Respect-Optimism-Care-Intentionality
Belonging-Mastery-Independence-Generosity*

The Oncourse Education Collaborative proudly embraces the above precepts of Invitational Education® and Circle of Courage™ by Reclaiming Youth International respectively as our philosophical foundations of service. These precepts are our mission in practice as we partner and collaborate together to better serve our at-promise children and youth.

The listed principles represent the higher moral ground we need to claim for our children and youth as well as for ourselves as we develop and relate with one another mentally, physically, socially, and therapeutically. However, we cannot fully realize this claim without the spiritual component that makes us whole.

It is no accident that both the Circle of Courage™ and Invitational Education® unapologetically embrace spirituality as an important component within their respective teachings. The Rev. Dr. Martin Brokenleg and Dr. Harvey Smith are the respective spiritual spokespersons for these two organizations.

The Oncourse Co-founders recognize the importance of embracing the spiritual component within our mission of service and as such, I have decided to reclaim my ministerial title as a columnist for this newsletter. I confess

that this was not my original intent. However, after viewing a first draft of this newsletter with the ministerial title by my name thanks to my co-founder and colleague, Scott Lee, I have agreed to accept both the call and the challenge along with the responsibility that is inherent with the acceptance to use the title.

Throughout my adult life I have viewed myself as both a ministering teacher and a teaching minister. For the past two decades I have found my calling to be in the educational realm and I know no greater mission than those who have accepted that call to serve our children and youth—particularly those we now call at-promise. Of course, this is an inclusive term that can be applied to all children and youth.

The fulfillment of accepting this call is service—*doing the work*. Advocacy for our children and youth becomes an important element within this mission of service to them.

Our advocacy is speaking up, speaking out, and *doing the work*. We cannot educate without advocacy and we cannot advocate without educating. The two are inseparable. We must advocate and educate if we are to serve as advocates for our children and youth.

Therefore, Oncourse's mission of service is to *intentionally invite one and all to the table of participation to creatively promote positive changes in schools, businesses, and organizations that will enrich the lives of individuals both personally and professionally. This mission is realized through the development of schools, partnerships, professional development, and advocacy.*

Response Abilities Pathways ©

We can provide this powerful relationship building training for your organization!

Our Children Our Community

Liz Roper, Co-Founder

This is an exciting time in the history of Tennessee education. We have a super opportunity to “get it right” with millions of dollars allocated to Tennessee from Race to the Top. At the state government level I am privy to seeing a service delivery model realigned and more technology and data tracking develop to supply information to serve students better, evaluate educators, and drive local school decisions.

The attitude of mediocre education is no longer acceptable. Tennessee recently developed more rigorous educational standards and then adopted national core standards last July. Our children will be better prepared for college and be able to compete globally which will greatly benefit our families and state economy.

A high school diploma is no longer enough education. Jobs today require more training, especially in communication and technology. Upgrading the curriculum and assessment standards in public schools will shorten the length of time it takes many student to attain a college degree. Fewer students will require remedial classes and more students will be able to graduate in four years instead of six.

This is a time of uncertainty with pressure filled environments for educators who are under the gun to produce student achievement while new standards and assessments are in the process of being developed once again. The new teacher evaluations will partially hinge on student achievement which is quite a change. And for students currently in upper grade levels, there is a sense of anxiety as families wonder what to do if their child is caught in the midst of change and do not meet the graduation requirements.

Still more reform is necessary to get it right- not only in Tennessee-but also in America. It's time to increase education and work expectations. Society must realize it's time to get tough, take education more seriously, and work together to develop our children and even families if we are to stay globally competitive.

The day of only asking parents to help on field trips and fund raisers is passé. Teaching schools to embrace parents as equal partners in school decisions, have parents and business partners on school committees, and create an open door policy both day and night to serve children and adults educationally and address their underlying needs will increase skills so that more people will succeed in life. This includes changing our work culture so that parents can get paid time off from work to help in schools and get involved in their children's education.

Parents frequently are an untapped resource. Teaching parents how to advocate for their children in school will be of tremendous benefit. Positive outcomes will result from parents being more involved in their children's education, navigating courses, and discussing post secondary opportunities. Student attendance and grades will increase. More children will graduate and go on to enter college and vocational school.

In addition college courses must be developed to assist our schools and district staff about developing effective collaboration with parents and community resources, and how to use school-wide educational data and the latest classroom technology instead of the schools struggling with this mainly by itself.

Schools that are fortunate enough to be centered in larger cities have the opportunity to collaborate with the community to provide services and supplies. We need to enlist even more community resources to develop our local talent. How will we help the schools that are

located in rural areas with little resources? This is another area to address.

It takes a village to educate our children, our community. It certainly is a process. We are getting there step by step with your help.

Reclaiming Youth International

Black Hills Seminars

June 25-28

Rapid City SD

www.reclaiming.com

No Relationship Left Behind

R. Scott Lee, Vice-President and Co-Founder

It continues to shock me that in all the hype, confusion and discourse of the past decade, how little concern and attention there has been to the connection between positive relationships between youth and adults. Furthermore, these relationships are an essential component of student achievement. One would assume that leaders in many local and state education authorities have on the top of every daily to-do list worry about staying off of AYP or worry about how to get off of AYP. Professional educators should always be concerned with state test scores. But in our short sighted system where achievement is measured by extremely narrow bubble tests has created a frenzy of activity that focuses too much energy on short

sighted issues rather than allowing us to actually teach kids.

Recently, the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago published what may be the most in-depth study of how to organize and operate successful schools. They studied the effects of locally managed elementary schools and compared schools with high performance to stagnant ones. Not surprisingly the schools that maintained their achievement over time all have several things in common that have nothing to do with test scores. These schools operated with a clear mission developed by all stakeholders. Professional development activities helped fulfill the mission. Parents participated at schools. The outlook was long-term. Instructional decisions were based on the current needs of students. But their most interesting conclusion: not only do relationships matter in schools where achievement is sustained; *positive, productive relationships are essential!* In their discussion of creating challenging, grade level teaching and learning for students must be connected with positive relationships for academic achievement to occur, the authors state “at base here is a complex interaction where a press toward higher academic standards must be coupled with ample personal support so that disadvantaged students have a realistic chance of responding successfully to those expectations” (p.60). Positive relationships between educator and student are essential for achievement, not just nice to have..

The work of the Oncourse Education Collaborative started several years before we were incorporated, the initial discussions between our Co-founders and other friends was

exactly the same: the importance of relationships is often lost from discussions in school improvement and reform. And we are still here - many stakeholders in schools wonder why there are problems with having a safe learning environment or why those test scores go up one year, but then drop the next. Unfortunately we don't often hear the question, “Have the adults in the school community been supported in building positive relationships with the students?” I once taught at a school where every faculty meeting focused on how we were trying to game the system by focusing academic support on students who previously only missed proficiency on state bubble tests by a few questions. Students who had passed state tests or who were not close to passing really were left behind. Our belief is different- intentionally create challenging and rigorous academic classes AND intentionally develop strong and trusting relationships with students.

Reference

Bryk, A.S., Sebring, P.B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., and Easton, J.Q. *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press: 2010.

Please visit our website

www.oncoursecollaborative.org

Opinions of authors may reflect personal opinions. Diversity of opinion and scientific inquiry is valued by the Collaborative and any authors invited to provide commentary comment independently.

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