

Educational Prosperity Initiative

August 7, 2014

10:00 AM

Fairmont Community Center

Call to Order- Jewel Walker-Harps

Present- Jessica Layfield, Rita Johnson, Chad Jacobs, Cade Willis, Dewey Haley, Mamie Smith, Wilbur Hightower, Ernest Lewis, Jimmy Jones, Robby Milner, Johnny Goodrum, Marie Pyron, Jillian Rafter, Annette Touchstone, Lucille Appling, Eloise Harps, Josph Walker, Jeff Jordan, Bruce Ballard, Bob Dull, Jewell Walker-Harps, Regina Abbott, Ray Lightner, Marie Pyron, Kenda Woodard, Sheila Mathews, Anissa Freeman, Patty Beckham, Fannie Delaney, Morris Leeks, Antoine Lucas, Donna Parks, Eddie Bogan, Linda Davis, Cleopatrck Lacy, Kenny West, and Dr. Robert Hayden. (37)

Prayer-

Pledge-

Minutes-

Call for a Community Discussion about Education- Dr. Robert V. Hayden (Reprint from Griffin Daily News by Ray Lightner on August 10, 2014) In a July 30 letter to the editor, local chiropractor Dr. Robert Hayden called for a community discussion about education. On Thursday, he took that same message to the Education Prosperity Initiative. Jewell Walker-Harps who chairs the EPI, said, "we believe one of the keys that opens doors is education, it brings about change and leads to prosperity," when introducing Hayden.

In both the letter and his presentation, Hayden reiterated that "education is critical to discussions we have." He said, "it was a scary thing to write that letter, as a local business owner, but it has had broad-based support."

In the letter and on Thursday, he gave an allegory of the situation — two boys growing up and going to school together.

"Little Jimmy acquires basic reading skills, studies, and makes grades sufficient for a 'B' grade-point average. He graduates and leaves for college with his HOPE Scholarship in hand. He emerges with a marketable skill and goes to work, but not in Griffin. He comes to Griffin occasionally to visit his parents and the Sock Shoppe," Hayden said.

"Little Johnny, on the other hand, fails to master reading, writing and arithmetic. He passes each grade, however, because his teachers cannot fail him. He has an intact self-image, as he has always passed his courses, but he is one of the 33.67 percent who do not graduate from high school." Hayden said of Johnny, "he does not leave Griffin, lacking options or prospects, over time, these Little Johnnies accumulate. The lack of marketable skills makes a life of crime more attractive to him, so some Johnnies find their way into the prison system. Many of the rest become the available labor force with which we hope to attract the next NACOM to Griffin-Spalding County."

Hayden said he moved to Griffin in 1988, and Griffin became his home. But he noted that was when two-thirds of Spalding County was functionally illiterate, 26 years ago. He praised the work of Terri Huddleston and the Griffin-Spalding Literacy Commission to get those rates down.

"I love this town, this is my home, but we have some issues. Statistics show Spalding County is not growing like neighboring counties are." Hayden cited statistics on:

- Unwed births, where there were 537 in Spalding County, but an average of 382 across the state;
- Graduation rate, which was 58.8 percent of students graduating in four years in Spalding County, now up to 63 percent, but still below the state average of 70.3 percent;
- Violent crime, at an incidence of 8.5 per 1,000 people, where the state average is 3.79 per 1,000. "The chances of being a victim of a violent crime are 1 in 118 in Spalding County, but, 1 in 264 across the state," he said.

"It bothers some to see our home in this context," Hayden said.

He also cited statistics on higher education, noting 20 percent of students in the University System of Georgia are in remedial classes, and at the 2-year colleges, it's 40 percent. At Gordon State College, where Hayden is an instructor, he said, "70 percent of students are in remedial courses and only one in six will graduate in six years."

He said, "things are be done to bridge the gap from high school to college, by I've asked myself, why is there a gap, why are students unable to obtain a marketable skill. What can we do?"

He noted 71 percent of students are economically disadvantaged and also cited what he saw as some of the causes.

"Equal opportunity is fundamentally American. Equal outcomes are a myth, that do not exist. We seem to want to force equal outcomes," Hayden said. "Competition is good, it brings out the best motivation to succeed."

A cause of the "equal outcomes" that he cited was intramural sports, where everyone gets to play and everyone gets a trophy. "Life is not like that," he said.

"As long as desire for equal outcome replaces equal opportunity, concern for feelings supplant reward for achievement, pressure to pass prevails over impartial application of classroom standards, the Little Johnnies will continue to multiply and not flourish."

He said, "we should reward achievement and success. The practice of passing kids to keep them with their grade, to maintain their self-esteem is nuts."

Hayden said those at the EPI meeting, "you can doubt that it happens, but why do so many kids from high school need remedial courses? Only 3.8 percent remained in grade (were not promoted) but 58 percent are in remedial courses."

He asked why AYP (adequate yearly progress) is applied to schools and not students. "Teachers tell me they have to teach to the test," Hayden said, "Why is the emphasis on grading the schools and not students?"

He said the reason was "a trend toward collectivism, where the needs of the group supersede the needs of the individual. Kids need to learn that they need take charge of own lives."

He also noted, "we have an illegitimacy issue we need to stem. Unwed births, children having children continues the cycle of poverty. The mother has to drop out of school to take care of her child or children and is locked in poverty."

Hayden noted there are 18,000 in Spalding County on food stamps. "This is a problem."

He read the definition of slavery as drudgery or toil, submission to or dependence on greater force. "I believe Johnny is locked into the life of economic slavery," he said.

"Those of us working can decide where to live, where to work. That unwed mother, her child cannot, they are in a cycle of poverty."

Hayden told those at the EPI meeting, "I bring these concerns not be critical of anyone. I want Griffin to be all it can be. Crime, poverty, economic hopelessness, economic slavery, are all issues that we need to discuss in the cold light of day."

Fannie Delaney, a retired educator, said, "it hurts me to hear this, but it is true fact. How do we address it?"

Hayden admitted he did not have the answers, but suggested parents and grandparents get involved in school PTOs at their kid's schools. "Get your voices heard."

County Commissioner Rita Johnson noted that "girls involved in sports have a sense of pride, determination and confidence. They are less likely to be victims, or to become pregnant. It's not the only way," she said, "but certainly is a way."

Hayden agreed, saying "sports pull in competition and build discipline."

To the issue of teen pregnancy, Pastor Mamie Smith noted girls, especially those without a father, "misunderstand attention for love."

Hayden said "it is a difficult, multi-faceted issue," and suggested "mentoring programs help kids at risk."

Joseph Walker, of the Spalding Collaborative, said a lot of these issues are being addressed and cited the mentoring program at the schools, as well more the 500 GED graduates a year. The school system is looking for additional mentors, it was noted.

Walker-Harps said "we are attempting to address the issues to change these statistics, but we do want to start a discussion." Bob Dull from the Griffin Housing Authority, suggest the Teen Maze program that he has seen in Cordele, which was required for all eighth graders. Students started at a mock DUI crash scene and back tracked the sources to a party and all of the decisions made. He said boys and girls also had to go through a mock teen pregnancy, carry the weight around and care for the child.

Dull said the Griffin Housing Authority has 16 different programs, and had been nominated for national awards for some of them. He said, "slavery is bondage, and it is generational if you don't address it."

Young Scholars- two students enrolled from public housing

Community Garden- Ferst Foundation volunteers have read to children in the garden over the summer. Children participated in the Young Master Gardener Program.

Kids in Action Moore Elementary Afterschool Program- getting ready to enroll students in the program

Mentoring- Volunteer trainings are on-going; goal for the upcoming school year is 50 mentor/mentee relationships

Backpack Food for Kids- The program will start the first week in September. Four school will be served unless more funds are raised to allow another school

GED / Adult Literacy- No report

Fairmont Heritage Park & Historical District- Roll-out pending

Career & College Prep Academy- In Charter School application process

Resident Council- No report

Youth Committee- Fairmont Zero Robotics team placed third in competition

Historical Committee- Continues
Introductions / Closing Comments-

Next Meeting- September 4 at 10 am at Fairmont Community Center.

Meeting adjourned

Respectfully submitted:


Regina Abbott, Consultant

Approved:


Jewel Walker-Harps, Chair