



Dorchester County
Public Schools
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Henry V. Wagner, Jr., Superintendent

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Mid Shore Community Mediation Center

Providing No-Cost Mediation Services to Caroline, Dorchester and Talbot Counties

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Business & Community Leaders Offer Ideas For Partnership With Dorchester Schools

Business and community leaders, local **government** representatives, and **school officials** gathered on **June 21** at the new **Dorchester Career and Technology Center (DCTC)** to share ideas for **working together on behalf of the students of Dorchester County**. About **fifty people** from diverse fields discussed options and opportunities that could benefit students, area businesses, and the local economy.

“**Dorchester’s Future Is Now**” was the brainchild of the **Business Partnerships & Adopt-A-School Subcommittee** of Dorchester County Public Schools **Superintendent Henry V. Wagner, Jr.’s, Superintendent’s Advisory Council**. Established as an outreach mechanism, the council is a group of more than thirty business, community, government, and faith-based leaders. They have met periodically over the past year for **candid talk** and positive feedback on **tangible goals** and activities for the **future of Dorchester County and its youth**.

One of four Council subcommittees, the Business Partnerships Subcommittee suggested taking advantage of the new DCTC to gather feedback from businesses. Rather than doing a traditional survey of the

business community, it was decided to hold a face-to-face brainstorming session conducted with the help of professional facilitators from **Mid Shore Community Mediation Center**.

Superintendent Wagner welcomed the diverse group, composed of members of the Board of Education and Dorchester County Public Schools, Dorchester Chamber of Commerce, Dorchester County Economic Development, the County Council of Dorchester County and numerous other business, government and community leaders. He expressed his intention to **build synergy with the business community** and make Dorchester County Public Schools a **positive factor** in the decision of businesses to locate in the county.

Introducing many of those present, he hoped to tap into the creativity and expertise of the participants “to see what we can accomplish throughout the county on behalf of the children.” **Mediation Center Executive Director Peter Taillie** coordinated the proceedings, emphasizing the power of **collaboration** in generating **new ideas**.

Seven groups of about eight individuals, each led by a volunteer mediator, sought answers to **questions posed for discussion**. Beginning with the identification of **values and resources shared** by Dorchester County Public Schools and the business community, the groups went on to discuss the **traits and talents needed by high school graduates** to make them more attractive to business, and where the school system has been **successful or deficient** in building those skills. The groups offered ideas for **best practices** that the schools should adopt, along with suggestions for **optimal use** of the Career and Technology Center.

Finally, the groups selected what they felt were the **best ideas** to come out of their discussions and reported them to the gathering as a whole.

David DeLuca, President of the Dorchester Chamber of Commerce and of Delco Packaging Products of Hurlock, described the energy in the room as incredible. “I truly felt the power of ideas from across the room,” he enthused. “What was most impressive was the immediate buy-in of the participants.”

Business leaders noted that, with twenty or thirty applicants for each position offered in the current economy, the bar is automatically raised for prospective employees. Employers have a choice and will select the best qualified applicants who also demonstrate the character traits that will be assets to the company. **Loyalty, teamwork, initiative, and leadership** were among the qualities of value to the participants.

Businesses both with local and global reaches were represented at the gathering, and some discussed whether there is a tension between training for jobs in the county versus jobs worldwide. **William Wise of Wise Oil** stressed that “the school system is supposed to prepare kids for life, not life in Cambridge.” **Tracy Tyler, President and CEO of Cambridge International**, noted that hers is a **global business**. “There aren’t too many countries where we don’t do business,” she said.

Having graduates who both can fill positions locally and also are able to move within a global company is important to attracting businesses to the community, a concern that is critical to the mission of another participant, **Keasha Haythe, Director of Dorchester County Economic Development.**

“If we don’t have a prepared work force, how will we attract business?” she asked. “This is the start of something good,” she added, envisioning the Career and Technology Center as an employment feeder for the **Dorchester County Technology Park.** “This is a place we can bring potential businesses and tell them, ‘You can fill your positions here.’”

In addition to training high school students, participants also encouraged DCTC to be a place for retraining adults and providing **continuing education** necessary to keep the current work force competitive. Wise suggested a two-shift structure, with DCTC holding **work force retraining** in evening sessions or providing local training opportunities for businesses that would otherwise send employees out of the area to learn new skills.

Dr. Vivian Fuller, Dean of the Cambridge campus of Sojourner-Douglass College, is keenly aware of the importance of adult education. She noted that providing the parents with advanced education helps make them recognize the importance of their children broadening their knowledge for later life.

More adult support for students, whether from parents or a mentor, was a theme repeated in many of the discussion groups, and businesses may be playing their own role in that support if one idea from the gathering is realized. Haythe expects **an internship program** to be an important result of the forum.

“This would be an opportunity for students to get into businesses, and give businesses a chance to interact with and potentially to hire students,” she explained. Haythe was pleased to see the business leaders who were there engaged and involved, wanting to be part of the **partnership.**

Allen Nelson, Executive Director of the Dorchester Chamber of Commerce, emphasized that education is the most important component to moving the county forward. “Better communication between the business community and the school system is critical,” he added. He described **a two-way relationship,** where the business community identifies what it needs from students and the work force, and works with the schools to ensure both students and adults are receiving the training and retraining necessary for a successful business environment.

Dorchester County Councilman Tom Bradshaw encouraged the Superintendent’s Advisory Council to be “good stewards of the investment made here today.” Superintendent Wagner thanked all who invested their time in the collaborative venture. He plans to have **comprehensive communication** with participants about the **results,** noting that the subcommittee would meet **to implement those ideas** that are immediately doable.

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