Community Leaders Join in Commitment to Literacy, Education Investment

In a rare demonstration of unity, Dalton and Whitfield County government and education leaders endorsed community literacy and pledged resources and support to help all area students read proficiently by third grade.

Mayor David Pennington and members of the Dalton City Council, Chairman Mike Babb and the Whitfield County Board of Commissioners, Chairman Danny Crutchfield and the members of the Dalton Board of Education, and Chairman Louis Fordham and members of the Whitfield County Board of Education agreed to sign a resolution “(to) provide resources and support to our city and county schools and families with the goal of improving early reading proficiency and helping all our children achieve grade-level reading status by the end of third grade.”

“There is clear and compelling evidence that children who are not proficient readers in third grade are already on the dropout track,” said Mayor Pennington in reading the Resolution to be adopted by each of the governing bodies at upcoming meetings. “Low achievement in reading has significant long-term consequences in terms of individual earning potential, global competitiveness, and general productivity.”

County Commission Chairman Mike Babb, in supporting the initiative, noted that the quality of education has a profound impact on jobs and the ability to attract an educated workforce. “We now understand how important this is to our economic future, and our children’s future,” Babb said. The commitment to early literacy was identified as a high leverage activity with considerable community benefit following more than two years of work by Archway Partnership work groups, said Rick Hooper, Chairman of the Archway Partnership Executive Committee.

“We are encouraging investment in education to ensure that our students are the best and most prepared in the state,” said Hooper. “As a community, we are committed to getting our children on
grade level at an early age. Today we are here to celebrate and support our local school systems’
decisions to prioritize our children and invest in their education in tough financial times.”

Danny Crutchfield, chair of the Dalton Board of Education, pledged the city school system’s re-
commitment to Literacy Collaborative, a comprehensive instructional framework to improve the reading
and writing achievement of students from pre-K through eighth grade.

City school leaders implemented the innovative Literacy Collaborative initially, Crutchfield said, because
they wanted “a literacy program that would transform the way we taught reading, writing, language
arts, comprehension, and digital literacy so that students in Dalton Public Schools would not only
become strong readers, writers, and communicators, but so they would develop a lifelong love for
reading and learning.”

The program has been reduced in scope due to budget cuts in recent years, but Crutchfield reported
Thursday that it will be restored for the 2012-2013 school year.

Whitfield County Schools has adopted the Literacy Collaborative framework as well, hoping to replicate
successes achieved in the city school system. “We believe this is the best chance to get our kids on track
and reduce remediation on the back end,” said County School Board Chairman Louis Fordham. “Our two
school boards feel it is our primary job to ensure our 20,500 students are prepared for life beyond high
school. If we fail to get every student on grade level, if we fail to teach every student to read
proficiently, if we fail to equip them with today’s skills, we fail our students.”

“We hope that this will be the first of many announcements about how we are working together to
make smart decisions for our students,” said Pennington.

The public announcement was coordinated and hosted by the Dalton-Whitfield Archway Partnership’s
Investing in Public Education Work Group.

**UGA Seeks To Hire Local Food and Nutrition Expert**

Last year the Dalton-Whitfield Archway Partnership Prenatal to Pre-K work group identified nutrition
and its impact on early brain development as a key issue facing the community’s birth to age five
population. During the spring of 2011, this work group determined that the community needed a way
to educate low-income families with small children on how to live a healthy lifestyle within their price range.
The University of Georgia’s Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) was persuaded
by the work group’s eagerness to localize EFNEP in Whitfield County. The program works by educating
families with young children on how to make simple, nutritious meals for the same cost and time as
running to a local fast food restaurant. The program’s goal is to vocalize the importance of nutritious meals for children and to improve their quality of life in the future.

After months of collaboration between the University of Georgia’s Cooperative Extension Service, the Whitfield County WIC program, and the local health department, the entities are ready to begin an EFNEP program in Whitfield County by hiring the first Dalton-Whitfield EFNEP agent. UGA is currently handling applications for the position, which it hopes to have filled by September 2012.

**UGA Environment and Design Students Present Research on Prater’s Mill**

On Monday, July 9th, University of Georgia Environment and Design students Nick Patrick, David Lucey, Drew Cutright, and Rachel Johnson presented their research on Prater’s Mill to the Whitfield County Commissioners, the Prater’s Mill Foundation, and other interested residents. The students' goal was to encourage the recreational use of Prater’s Mill while still maintaining the site's historical integrity. Nick Patrick began the presentation by explaining the history and background of Prater’s Mill. He then described some maintenance issues and concerns, which are extensively addressed in the historic structures report he prepared for the Prater’s Mill Foundation.

David Lucey and Drew Cutright proceeded to share potential recreational uses of Prater’s Mill and how to attract members of the public to the site. The team had several great ideas on how to expand the site's activities and still keep its historical essence. One of the ideas included a do-it-yourself interpretive trail. This allows people to hike/bike the trails at Prater’s Mill while also learning about the site's historical background. Some profit-making ideas included repurposing the country store into a café with a playground attached, providing put-ins and rentals so that people can kayak or tube down the portion of the Conasauga River that runs through the property, and planting fruit plants and producing and selling jellies and jams.

The Whitfield County Commissioners and the Prater's Mill Foundation will consider the students' work over the next several months and will work with the University of Georgia to determine next steps.