

## **Anoka-Hennepin School District, Faith and Community Partnership April 24, 2012**

Members of the Anoka-Hennepin School District, Faith and Community Partnership gathered Tuesday, April 24 at the Staff Development Center to share successes. The meeting was lead by Dr. Jinger Gustafson, associate superintendent for middle schools and chair of the Anoka-Hennepin School District, Faith and Community Partnership Steering Committee.

### **Review of statement of purpose**

The group reviewed the Statement of Purpose:

The Anoka-Hennepin School District, Faith and Community Partnership is a collaborative effort of the Anoka-Hennepin School District, faith based organizations and broader communities to raise an awareness and understanding of compelling community issues and to mobilize people to help meet the basic needs of students.

Using open communication and creativity, this collaboration will provide immediate response to those in need and will offer specific suggestions for those who want to help.

### **Celebrations – small group conversation and large group share**

Each group discussed how their partnerships are working and they shared their successes with the large group.

Reports included:

Blaine High School and Emmanuel Christian Center

Cassidy Pohl, BHS student learning advocate, said the partnership is just beginning and they enjoyed the opportunity to get to know each other at this meeting.

Monroe Elementary School and Discover Church

Melissa Laager, Monore social worker, said the partnership just began a couple of months ago. Two more churches have joined the effort. The faith partners provided food baskets at the holiday season and cold winter clothing. Pastor Carl Billings has come to the school to read to third grade classes.

Adams Elementary School, Andover High School and Riverdale Church

The church provided food at Thanksgiving, adopted four families at Christmas and is helping with a food shelf. They would like to help more in the schools and will offer to help teachers set up their classrooms at the beginning of the school year and tear them down at the end of the school year. Church members would also like to provide meals for teachers the first day of school and during conferences. They are trying to figure out what is the best way to help high school students.

Anoka Middle School for the Arts, Anoka High School and First Baptist Church, Anoka Church members have been working to support students experiencing the death of family members. They also assisted with a family who lost everything in a fire this winter. They have provided numerous articles of cold-weather clothing. They have lots of coats left and are willing

to provide them to other schools in need. Principal Mike Farley said Anoka High School is blessed to have such a strong connection with the faith community. If there is a need he puts out a call and it is answered. This has been a huge support to the school.

River Trail Learning Center, Ramsey Elementary School and Northgate Church  
Pastor Wayne Skaff said the church did a coat drive for River Trail. One senior told him that this was the first new coat she had ever received. Church members are also interested in doing a career development mentor program for students. Church members will provide dinner for families during the school's annual art fair in May. Church members are working with students at Ramsey Elementary School in an after school program called, "Good News Club."

Madison Elementary School, Jefferson Elementary School, Eisenhower Elementary School, Hamilton Elementary School, Hoover Elementary School, Sand Creek Elementary School, University Avenue Elementary School and Peace Lutheran Church  
Ceal Byron said the church has provided food to families during Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter for 14 years. At Christmas they also provide gifts for families and cold-weather clothing. During the summer they provide lunches from Mondays through Thursdays for children and adults at the church. Last summer they served 2,000 lunches. Ceal is also in talks to work with Northdale students and families. Sue Waslik, from Eisenhower Elementary, thanked Ceal and Peace Lutheran for all of their work.

Champlin Park High School, Champlin United Methodist Church, Family of God Lutheran Church, and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints  
Amy Harnack, a counselor at CPHS and the school's homeless lead, said in August they held a free haircut and school supply event. Almost 200 families were served. It will be held again Aug. 6. Members of the partnership will help clean out lockers at the end of the school year to collect gently used school supplies for the Aug. 6 event. Amy has a number of faith partners she works with to help keep the CPHS and Jackson Middle School's food shelves sustained. Faith partners provided food at the holidays and cold-weather clothing. Amy said anytime she needs anything she puts out an e-mail and she receives more than she needs. Kay Roberts, Champlin United Methodist Church, said she is also working to bring in community partners. This winter a local library hosted a coat drive. Dana from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints said a drive at their church collected 8,000 items for CPHS and JMS. They divided collecting items by groups, e.g. the youth group collected food and the women's group collected blankets.

Oak View Middle School, Andover Christian church, Constance Free Church-Bridgelink and Meadow Creek Church  
Cindy Cummings from Meadow Creek Church said they are working with the school to set up a calendar to provide a "road map of needs." That way the church can add things into its schedule. They are currently doing a basic needs drive.

Crossroads Alternative High School and Epiphany Catholic Church  
Principal Nancy Chave said the partnership has been amazing. The church did a drive for the food shelf and school supplies. (65 percent of students at Crossroads are eligible for free or reduced lunch. This is a federal indicator of poverty.) Nancy said her students have been

interested in returning the church members' kindness and have helped out during the churches Family Table events. Nancy said they want to have a true partnership.

Lincoln Elementary School, Anoka Middle School for the Arts and Zion Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Tiede said the church held a successful school supply drive. They held a second school supply drive in January because by that point many pencils are broken and other new items are needed. They also did a collection for cold-weather clothing and took four vanloads to each school. Any "extras" were taken to the Family Welcome Center. Church members also volunteer at Lincoln for the Junior Achievement Program.

McKinley Elementary School and Oak Haven Church  
Stephanie Ochocki, McKinley social worker, said Oak Haven has provided support during the holidays. The church also allows McKinley to use its facilities for the school's Kindness Retreat. This is extremely helpful to the school and allows it to continue this popular event because Oak Haven allows them to save transportation and rental costs.

### **Praise, polish and ponder**

After reporting out to the large group, small groups were asked to answer the following questions on a form: praise, we really like. . . .; polish, we would change. . . .; and ponder, we wonder if. . .

Input on the forms was as follows:

#### **Praise**

Adams Elementary, Andover High School and Riverdale Church  
Open and willingness of the faith partnership to come forward to partner.  
Communication of what's going on.  
Idea sharing: mentor ideas with high school kids; holiday help; basic needs help; and faith members want to support staff, too.

Anonymous

Good News Club.  
Students serve at Family Table.  
Use of church facility.

Anonymous

Opportunity for partnerships.  
Response from the community to strengthen the community/school.

Roosevelt Middle School and Prairie Oak Church  
Care Committee – basic care and compassion of families.  
Mentoring 42 students.

#### **Polish**

Adams Elementary, Andover High School and Riverdale Church.  
Communicating the calendar of dates of school-wide events and how we can work together on those events.

Anonymous

True partnerships.

Physical, mental and spiritual (whole person focus).

Can't put an add up because it's a church.

More direct interaction and on-going connection with families (give a business card).

Adopting a family and develop an on-going relationship with family.

Anonymous

Staff and parent attitudes towards faith partnerships.

Hennepin County schools

Wash lost and found and locker clean out clothes at a laundromat or Pathways.

Letters to free and reduced lunch kids inviting them to August haircuts and school supply event.

Freephones.com

YMCA

Get word to elementary schools about August event.

Clear job descriptions.

Anonymous

Identify families for holiday giving in October so can plan ahead.

Communication system.

Like the mapping.

Connecting with all resources – community, church and county.

Roosevelt Middle School and Prairie Oak Church

Assimilating new partnerships, working beside others.

Meet a couple times a year to re-connect, share.

Meet at the school level to share project and ideas.

More time after school for “fun” activities.

### **Ponder**

Adams Elementary, Andover High School and Riverdale Church

How can we keep supporting each other over the summer?

Anonymous

Charter schools in area – can they be more involved?

Identifying needs of church members so schools can give back, a true partnership.

Churches take over food shelves/clothing drive instead of having it in the schools.

There are ways to expand and include other agencies/businesses.

Ways to expand use of church facilities.

Anonymous

A district-wide message to continue partnerships.

No separation of church and state – how will the district respond if there is push back?

How to broaden the greater need to the parents and understand the bigger picture.

Can partnerships communicate opportunities available at churches, e.g. vacation bible school?

Hennepin County schools

The kids could do more, e.g. extra curricular organizations can do fund raising.

Anonymous

Expand mentoring.

Roosevelt Middle School and Prairie Oak Church

Geographically sharing, e.g. McKinley, RMS and BHS share what is working.

To mentor a larger number of students with the strengths mentoring.

What to do when you don't have easy communication? Can we go through an assistant principal or principal?

In addition to filling out the forms, a question was raised if members of the Anoka-Hennepin School District, Faith and Community Partnership are communicating with Anoka County officials about the families they are helping. One pastor said when he receives a request of help from someone he asks if the person has a county social worker and if he can contact the social worker. It's important to make sure people are not falling through the cracks and that Anoka County has a true sense of need and people requiring assistance. Anoka County Community Resource Guides were handed out at the meeting so partners are aware of resources available to individuals.

A question was also raised about how members answer questions about the separation of church and state. As the mission statement outlines, the intent of the Anoka-Hennepin School District, Faith and Community Partnership is to help students and their families that have basic needs. The school district approached area churches for help more than two years ago after a number of student and staff deaths. The Great Recession also took a toll on the district's communities that saw high unemployment and foreclosure rates. Students who attend local churches are the same students the Anoka-Hennepin School District is educating. Pastor Tiede said that schools aren't a place to proselytize; there will be another time and place for that. "God gives us those moments, they will come, but we have to be sensitive to where we are," he said.

### **Closing**

Jinger thanked everyone for attending the meeting and providing great input. The Steering Committee will debrief on the large group meeting and review the feedback to determine next steps.