

2008

Report of Focus Group Meetings

Presented to:
Page County Public Schools

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Introduction

In an ongoing effort to improve the quality of life for the residents of Page County, Page County Public Schools, the Page Alliance for Community Action (PACA) awarded Barnes Technologies International, LLC (BTILLC) a contract to conduct a needs assessment. The purpose of the needs assessment was to gather data to help PACA and the school district gain funding for projects to impact youth and families. The key impetus is to work towards a safe, healthy, and drug-free community. The School Board of Page County recognized that they cannot be the only positive service available to Page County's youth. The needs assessment provide the school board a means to continue to leverage and build upon the trust between the public school system and the key stakeholders and support groups, such as parent groups, school personnel, private and non-profit organizations, law enforcement, and community and public agencies within the county.

As part of the needs assessment of Page County, BTILLC conducted three focus groups to gain an understanding of what the residents of Page County perceive or know about the key issues that affect their lives. These focus groups included a community-based group, a school-based group and a parent-based group.

Description of Page County

Formed in 1831 from Shenandoah and Rockingham counties, Page County is nestled between the Blue Ridge and Massanutten Mountains of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Page County is comprised of 314 total square miles (813 km²) of which 311 square miles (805 km²) is land and 3 square miles (8 km²) is water. It is located approximately 90 miles from Washington, D.C., 120 miles from Richmond, the Commonwealth capital, 15 miles from Interstate 81 and 30 miles from Interstate 66. Page County is comprised of three towns: Shenandoah, Stanley, and Luray, the county seat. Luray is the hub for most public and private services in Page County including retail, tourism, health and industry.

Page County has grown 5.3% in the last seven (7) years, from 23, 177 as recorded in the 2000 U.S. Census to 24,400 in July 2007 as recorded by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (30 January 2008) at the University of Virginia. The current population density is 78 people per square mile. This growth is 3.6% below the Commonwealth of Virginia's growth of 8.9% for the same period of time. Their population identifies a smaller percentage of young people and

working age than the Commonwealth. It also shows a greater number than average and growing ratio of retirees. The Virginia Employment Commission (Daily News Record, January 31, 2008) reported that Page County's unemployment rate for December 2007 was 6.5%, compared to the Commonwealth of Virginia's rate of 3.3% and the U.S. rate of 4.8%. According to the 2000 U.S. Census of the 9,305 households, 29.60% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 55.80% were married couples living together, 10.50% had a female householder with no husband present, and 28.70% were non-families. 24.40% of all households were made up of individuals and 11.10% had someone living alone who is 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.46 and the average family size was 2.91.

There are lower socio-economic measures for Page County in relation to its neighboring counties or the Commonwealth of Virginia. The median household income in 2005 for Page County was \$38,549 compared to \$54,207 for the Commonwealth of Virginia or an 11% increase in household income since 2000. In 2005 poverty for all ages in Page County was 3,116 or 13.3% of its population, compared to 10.0% for the Commonwealth of Virginia. The proportion of Page County individuals under the age 18 living in poverty in 2005 was 19.5% or 997 individuals, up from 15.7% in 2000, compared to 13.3% for the Commonwealth of Virginia (U.S. Census, 30 January 2008). Page County Public Schools have an above average number of children who are in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Forty-one (41) percent of Page County Public School children are in the free and reduced lunch program. In two elementary schools, 50% or more of the children are enrolled in this program. (Virginia Department of Education, 30, January 2008).

Page County resident's educational attainment is also below the Commonwealth's and U.S. levels. The 2000 U.S. Census (31 January 2008) shows that 39.7% of Page County residents have a high school degree or equivalent, compared to Virginia's percentage of 26.0 and the U.S. percentage of 28.3. 15.3% of Page's residents have some college or an associate's degree, compared to Virginia's percentage of 26.0 and the U.S. percentage of 27.4. Only 5.9% of Page residents hold a bachelor's degree, compared to 17.9% for Virginia and 15.5% for the U.S. 3.9% of Page residents have an earned master's, professional or doctorate degree, compared to 11.6% in Virginia and 8.9% in the U.S.

The Virginia Department of Health (31 January 2008) shows an above average number of health related problems for a county the size of Page. The pregnancy rate per 1000 for the population of ages 10-19 in Page County in 2006 was 25.7%, or 37 teenage pregnancies. The Virginia Department of Health also reported five (5) suicides for Page County in 2006.

Page County has little public transportation within each of its three towns, or between towns. A large number of their citizens work outside of the county with a typical commute time of 32 minutes. Of the 10,847 workers age 16 and older as reported in the 2000 U.S. Census, 93.4% use their own vehicle to drive to work, 0.2% use public transportation, 1.5% walk and 4.4% work at home (31 January 2008).

While some of these demographics and data paint a dim picture about Page County, they also provide rich opportunities to unite a community to explore ways of improving these conditions. One way to gain an understanding of what the residents of Page County perceive or know about the key issues that affect their lives is through focus groups. The following sections describe the procedures and results of the focus group process.

Methodology

Barnes Technologies International, LLC (BTILLC) conducted three focus groups during December 2007 and January 2008 to assess the local citizens' awareness and understanding of issues that affect the youth in Page County. According to Stewart & Shamdasani (1990), the focus group technique was developed after World War II to evaluate audience response to radio programs. From that time researchers program evaluators have found focus groups to be useful in understanding how or why people hold certain beliefs about a topic or program of interest. A focus group could be defined as a group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue.

A focus group is typically 7-10 people who are unfamiliar with each other. These participants are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the topic of the focus group. The moderator or interviewer creates a permissive and nurturing environment that encourages different perceptions and points of view, without pressuring participants to vote, plan or reach consensus (Krueger, 1988). The group discussion is conducted several times with similar types of participants to identify trends and patterns in perceptions. Careful and systematic analysis of the discussions provides clues and insights as to how a product, service, or opportunity is perceived by the group.

For this study, each focus group was comprised of representatives from one of the three identified stakeholder constituencies of Page County: community members, school personnel, or parents. The number of participants for these focus groups ranged from six (6) to twelve (12).

BTILLC used a SWOT Analysis to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the community of Page County. BTILLC focused on three (3) areas:

1. health and wellness
2. crime and violence prevention
3. community involvement

A SWOT analysis guides one to identify the positives and negatives inside a community (Strength & Weakness) and outside of it, in the external environment (Opportunity & Threat). Developing a full awareness of the situation can help with both strategic planning and decision-making. This information is used to:

1. explore possibilities to problems
2. make decisions for your initiative
3. determine where change is possible
4. adjust and refine plans mid-course

Strengths and weaknesses identify key human resources, physical resources, financial, activities and processes, and past experiences internal to the community. Opportunities and threats identify future trends, the economy, funding sources, demographics, the physical environment, legislation, and local, national or international events external to the community.

BTILLC lead the focus group participants through a rapid-fire identification of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the community of Page County. In order to facilitate this process, BTILLC staff established the following guidelines for participants before each session:

1. come to the meeting prepared to participate, not any participant is exempted from participation.
2. participants will respect each other.
3. all ideas and responses are good and have value.
4. no ideas or responses will be debated or discussed.

Community Focus Group Summary

The Community Focus Group was conducted on December 4, 2007 at the Page County School Board Building. The focus group consisted of twelve (12) participants that represented all regions of the county and included key civic and business leaders, private and non-profit

organizations, health agencies, public safety organizations, and youth organizations. A SWOT Analysis was used by the BTILLC facilitator to gain an understanding about the community relative to three areas: (1) health and wellness, (2) crime and violence prevention, and (3) community involvement. A summary of the Community Focus Group is found in the following section of this report.

Health and Wellness Issues

The BTILLC facilitator explored the following health and wellness issues with the Community Focus Group participants:

1. availability of drugs, alcohol and tobacco/prevention
2. availability for physical activity
3. HIV/AIDS prevention
4. teen pregnancy prevention
5. mental health
6. counseling
7. nutrition and dietary education

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as it relates to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- ✚ parks and recreation facilities
- ✚ DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education)
- ✚ Gus Bus (a mobile literacy program)
- ✚ Child Care Connections (childcare provider referral service through the hospital)
- ✚ violence prevention within schools
- ✚ school-based after school programs
- ✚ youth programs
- ✚ faith-based programs
- ✚ Healthy Families Program (hospital outreach program)
- ✚ Gang Task Force
- ✚ Drug Task Force
- ✚ civic organizations
- ✚ collaboration amongst local groups

-
- ✚ mentoring program

Weaknesses

- ✚ Neighbor Watch
- ✚ child safety program
- ✚ need better sex education instruction – outdated Family Life curriculum
- ✚ community apathy towards community initiatives
- ✚ drug and alcohol abuse
- ✚ finding alternative activities for youth recreation
- ✚ lack of a variety of after-school programs
- ✚ community not open to change
- ✚ lack of child care options
- ✚ lack of community transportation

Opportunities

- ✚ building partnership initiatives (Building leaders)
- ✚ drug/alcohol rehabilitation
- ✚ substance abuse facilities
- ✚ intermediate counseling services
- ✚ mental health services
- ✚ after school programs
- ✚ volunteer literacy agency

Threats

- ✚ community culture
- ✚ community participation and lack of volunteers
- ✚ communication channels
- ✚ apathy

Crime and Violence Prevention

The BTILLC facilitator explored the following crime and violence prevention measures with the Community Focus Group participants:

1. gang activity

-
2. property destruction
 3. theft, robbery
 4. assaults
 5. bullying
 6. juvenile homicide
 7. school safety techniques/methods
 8. prevention programs

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- + agriculture-based programs
- + DARE
- + Gus Bus
- + PALS program (culture)
- + Child Care Connections
- + violence prevention within schools
- + school-based after school programs
- + youth programs
- + faith-based programs
- + Healthy Families Program
- + Gang Task Force
- + Drug Task Force
- + civic organizations
- + collaboration amongst local groups
- + mentoring program

Weaknesses

- + Neighbor Watch
- + child safety program
- + community apathy towards community initiatives
- + different culturally thinking people based on socio-economic levels and geography
- + finding alternative activities for youth recreation
- + lack of a variety of after-school programs
- + community not open to change

-
- ✚ lack of child care options
 - ✚ lack of community transportation

Opportunities

- ✚ places of connecting/building relationships
- ✚ building partnership initiatives (Building leaders)
- ✚ drug/alcohol rehabilitation
- ✚ substance abuse facilities
- ✚ intermediate counseling services
- ✚ mental health services
- ✚ after school programs

Threats

- ✚ community culture
- ✚ community participation and lack of volunteers
- ✚ communication channels
- ✚ apathy

Community Involvement

The BTILLC facilitator explored community involvement with the Community Focus Group participants by examining the following issues:

1. volunteer involvement
2. low neighborhood attachment
3. geographic & ethnic diversity
4. percentage of people working outside of county
5. community support groups
6. after school programs
7. access to weapons

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- ✚ Habitat for Humanity

-
- + parks and recreation facilities
 - + agriculture-based programs
 - + DARE
 - + Gus Bus
 - + PALS program (culture)
 - + Child Care Connections
 - + violence prevention within schools
 - + school-based after school programs
 - + youth programs
 - + faith-based programs
 - + Healthy Families Program
 - + Gang Task Force
 - + Drug Task Force
 - + civic organizations
 - + collaboration amongst local groups
 - + mentoring program

Weaknesses

- + Neighbor Watch
- + child safety program
- + need better sex education instruction
- + community apathy towards community initiatives
- + different culturally thinking people based on socio-economic levels and geography
- + drug and alcohol abuse
- + finding alternative activities for youth recreation
- + lack of a variety of after-school programs
- + community not open to change
- + lack of child care options
- + lack of community transportation

Opportunities

- + places of connecting/building relationships
- + building partnership initiatives (Building leaders)
- + drug/alcohol rehabilitation
- + substance abuse facilities

-
- ✚ intermediate counseling services
 - ✚ mental health services
 - ✚ after school programs
 - ✚ volunteer literacy agency

Threats

- ✚ community culture
- ✚ community participation and lack of volunteers
- ✚ communication channels
- ✚ apathy

School Focus Group Summary

The School Focus Group was conducted on January 16, 2008 at the Page County School Board Building. The focus group consisted of six (6) participants who represented the teachers and counselors of the schools in all regions of Page County. A SWOT Analysis was used by the BTILLC facilitator to gain an understanding about the community relative to three areas: (1) health and wellness, (2) crime and violence prevention, and (3) community involvement. A summary of the School Focus Group is found in the following section.

Health and Wellness Issues

The BTILLC facilitator explored the following health and wellness issues with the School Focus Group participants:

1. availability of drugs, alcohol and tobacco/prevention
2. availability for physical activity
3. HIV/AIDS prevention
4. teen pregnancy prevention
5. mental health
6. counseling
7. nutrition and dietary education

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as it relates to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- + DARE program
- + scouting programs
- + recreation leagues
- + Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) programs
- + Luray High School – stop smoking program
- + school nurses
- + counseling – Anti-Drug Week
- + church youth groups
- + Family Life curriculum in schools
- + 4-H
- + 21st Century
- + Page (Gus Bus)

Weaknesses

- + parents work outside of county
- + interstate – proximity to drug traffic
- + outdated Family Life curriculum
- + economic stressors
- + parents reluctant to talk to children
- + parents push for children to date earlier
- + 4-H not countywide
- + lack of transportation to and from events

Opportunities

- + Big Gem sports complex
- + parent education
- + improve family life curriculum to reflect the technology/video world that they cherish
- + places for children to meet with kids who provide good role models
- + expand 4-H countywide
- + expand transportation to help those in need to travel to and from events

Threats

- + misinformation or lack of information for parents regarding children's need for guidance
- + parents lack of trust in the school system and what is in the best interest for the children

-
- ✚ providing opportunities for all students to reach their full potential –
 - students typically not thought of as college caliber, but who have the ability to succeed in college are not encouraged to pursue college
 - helping parents who do not have the information, skills or experience to learn about scholarship and other financial opportunities that would help pay for their child’s college education
 - helping students and their families to understand that not all students need to go to college to have a successful career

Crime and Violence Prevention

The BTILLC facilitator explored the following crime and violence prevention measures with the Community Focus Group participants:

1. gang activity
2. property destruction
3. theft, robbery
4. assaults
5. bullying
6. juvenile homicide
7. school safety techniques/methods
8. prevention programs
9. access to weapons

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as it relates to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- ✚ not a large gang problem – mostly “wanna-be’s”
- ✚ adults and teachers knows children and their relationships
- ✚ mentoring programs with teachers and older children
- ✚ guidance program addresses “bullying” problem
- ✚ 2nd Step Violence Prevention training (4th & 5th grades)
- ✚ CHOICES – domestic violence prevention
- ✚ school plays (Drama Club); Culture Clubs; Other school clubs where students who are non-athletes can participate and feel a part of a worthy activity

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- + after school programs – some students are bused to these programs
 - + school band program
 - + 4-H in part of the county
 - + Gang and Drug Task Forces
 - + police officers are in the schools

Weaknesses

- + lack of mentoring program in 6th, 7th and 8th grades (crucial years)
- + few programs exist for students who are not in athletics or band
- + some school clubs and other activities have been discontinued due to increase demands on teachers workload

Opportunities

- + gang awareness programs
- + mentoring programs
- + Boys and Girls Club or other supervised after school activities

Threats

- + teachers not motivated or willing to sponsor school clubs or activities

Community Involvement

The BTILLC facilitator explored community involvement with the Community Focus Group participants by examining the following issues:

1. volunteer involvement
2. low neighborhood attachment
3. geographic & ethnic diversity
4. percentage of people working outside of county
5. community support groups
6. after school programs
7. mentoring programs

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as it relates to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- ✚ 4-H (part of the county)
- ✚ scouting
- ✚ people will attend athletic events
- ✚ Imagination Center
- ✚ teachers are working to help when they are asked to help, they usually get it from parents
- ✚ Career Day at some schools
- ✚ all students will take PSAT
- ✚ track student interest alignment with course selection

Weaknesses

- ✚ people will not attend non-athletic events
- ✚ lack of intergenerational involvement for citizens
- ✚ weak transportation systems for after school activities and events that keep some children from participating in the events
- ✚ students to not have a teen/community center
- ✚ too many children unsupervised after school because large number of parents work outside of the county
- ✚ concerns about safety at night events
- ✚ PTA is weak – almost non-existent at some schools
- ✚ Career Day does not exist at all schools
- ✚ parents are not aware of available financial support for students who will be first generation to go to college or other post-high school educational programs
- ✚ cultural differences across geographical regions of the county

Opportunities

- ✚ teen/community center
- ✚ community athletic facilities for non-school athletic programs
- ✚ use key community role models/mentors to help students understand what is possible if they apply themselves
- ✚ use retirees, seniors and other available citizens to help with special programs for students
- ✚ develop career shadowing programs
- ✚ support PTA initiatives

-
- ✚ develop a variety of communication initiatives to inform parents about college financial aid, admission practices, etc.
 - ✚ increase the number of after school opportunities for students

Threats

- ✚ geographical cultural separation
- ✚ lack of adequate public transportation
- ✚ attitude of parents that what we currently have was good enough for them and thus is good enough for their children
- ✚ difficulty changing expectations regarding what their children should do after graduation or that it is OK for my child to drop out of school

Parent Focus Group Summary

The Parent Focus Group was conducted on January 16, 2008 at the Page County School Board Building. The focus group consisted of nine (9) participants that represented the various geographic areas of the schools in Page County. However, it should be noted that most of the parent representatives worked in some capacity with Page County Public Schools, so they be more informed about school services and programs than a typical parent who does not work within the system. A SWOT Analysis was used by the BTILLC facilitator to gain an understanding about the community relative to three areas: (1) health and wellness, (2) crime and violence prevention, and (3) community involvement. The following section is a summary of the Parent Focus Group responses.

Health and Wellness Issues

The BTILLC facilitator explored the following health and wellness issues with the Parent Focus Group participants:

1. availability of drugs, alcohol and tobacco/prevention
2. availability for physical activity
3. HIV/AIDS prevention
4. teen pregnancy prevention
5. mental health

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6. counseling
 7. nutrition and dietary education

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as it relates to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- + hospital has nutritional counseling
- + DARE program
- + church youth programs
- + Greenway
- + Big Gem
- + haunted mansion

Weaknesses

- + Family Life curriculum is out-dated – boys can opt out of program
- + interstate – proximity to drug traffic
- + have to pay for nutrition counseling
- + there is a group of needy children that do not qualify for free and reduced lunch program, but need it
- + no time for adequate health and physical education
- + there is a growing percent of parents who do not provide good role models for their children (drugs, smoking, alcohol, etc.)
- + teachers do not get the needed support and participation from parents
- + girls are not interested in physical activity as part of school curriculum
- + lack of transportation to and from events
- + lack of teen community center
- + recreation and leagues charge a fee or have travel cost associated with them that keep some students from participating – mostly for older students
- + lack of activities for non-athletes

Opportunities

- + more consequences and rehabilitation for illegal drug use, including alcohol
- + increasing public transportation through the county – not all parents and students can return to school to attend school activities
- + expand DARE to entire county

-
- + improve family life curriculum to reflect the technology/video world that they cherish
 - + places for children to meet with other children who provide good role models
 - + expand 4-H countywide
 - + expand transportation to help those in need to travel to and from events
 - + expand recreation leagues for all ages
 - + teen/community center
 - + health education in all schools
 - + funds for nutrition counseling for all

Threats

- + parent apathy
- + parents values do not align with school programs and philosophy
- + regions in the county have different beliefs, values and needs than other regions of the county – people in region not willing to change or compromise
- + misinformation or lack of information for parents regarding children’s need for guidance
- + parents lack of trust in the school system and what is in the best interest for the children
- + providing opportunities for all students to reach their full potential –
 - o students typically not thought of as college caliber, but who have the ability to succeed in college are not encouraged to pursue college
 - o helping parents who do not have the experience, skills and knowledge to learn about scholarship and other financial opportunities that would help pay for their child’s college education
 - o helping students to understand that not all students need to go to college to have a successful career

Crime and Violence Prevention

The BTILLC facilitator explored the following crime and violence prevention measures with the Community Focus Group participants:

1. gang activity
2. property destruction
3. theft, robbery
4. assaults
5. bullying
6. juvenile homicide

-
7. school safety techniques/methods
 8. prevention programs

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as it relates to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- + high schools have motivational speakers program
- + Cable Channel 15 provide school information to parents
- + mentoring programs with teachers and older children
- + guidance program addresses “Bullying” problem
- + 2nd Step Violence Prevention training (4th & 5th grades)
- + CHOICES – domestic violence prevention
- + school band program
- + 4-H in part of the county
- + Gang and Drug Task Forces

Weaknesses

- + parents are not aware of potential gang problem
- + lack of mentoring program in 6th, 7th and 8th grades (crucial years)
- + few programs exist for students who are not in athletics or band
- + some school clubs and other activities have been discontinued due to increase demands on teachers workload
- + conflict resolution is not taught in schools
- + lack of middle schools prevents middle age students from feeling part of their elementary or high school
- + lack of materials for teachers to help reinforce guidance counselor’s student information
- + counselors are only available to some at risk children
- + not all parents have access to Cable Channel 15

Opportunities

- + gang awareness programs
- + mentoring programs
- + Boys and Girls Club or other supervised after school activities
- + more assemblies for middle age and high school children (drugs, suicide, bullying)
- + improve communication methods

Threats

- ✚ teachers not motivated or willing to sponsor school clubs or activities
- ✚ parent work outside of the county
- ✚ parents not concerned that they model inappropriate behavior for their children
- ✚ parents opt their children out of guidance
- ✚ teachers use “they do not have time” as an excuse for not working with extra-curricular activities

Community Involvement

The BTILLC facilitator explored community involvement with the Community Focus Group participants by examining the following issues:

1. volunteer involvement
2. low neighborhood attachment
3. geographic & ethnic diversity
4. percentage of people working outside of county
5. community support groups
6. after school programs
7. access to weapons

The participants identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to health and wellness issues in Page County.

Strengths

- ✚ 4-H (part of the county)
- ✚ scouting
- ✚ mentoring programs
- ✚ high school community service projects
- ✚ teachers are working to help when they are asked to help, they usually get it from parents
- ✚ Career Day at some schools
- ✚ Healthy Families of Page
- ✚ Page (a mobile literacy unit dedicated to Page County – outgrowth of Gus Bus)

Weaknesses

- ✚ mentoring program only for at risk students
- ✚ lack of economics education
- ✚ civic clubs do not work with at risk students
- ✚ students do not have a teen/community center
- ✚ too many children unsupervised after school because large number of parents work outside of the county
- ✚ lack of counseling for at-risk children
- ✚ students do not understand career or post high school options
- ✚ goal setting is not taught in schools
- ✚ parents are not aware of available financial support for students who will be first generation to go to college or other post-high school educational programs
- ✚ cultural differences across geographical regions of the county

Opportunities

- ✚ teen/community center
- ✚ expand mentoring program
- ✚ use key community role models/mentors to help students understand what is possible if they apply themselves
- ✚ use retirees, seniors and other available citizens to help with special programs for students
- ✚ develop career shadowing programs
- ✚ need more support groups
- ✚ develop a variety of communication initiatives to inform parents about college financial aid, admission practices, etc.
- ✚ increase the number of after school opportunities for students
- ✚ need to provide after school opportunities for those students who are left unsupervised because parent work outside of the county or both parents are working

Threats

- ✚ geographical cultural separation
- ✚ lack of adequate public transportation
- ✚ attitude of parents that what we currently have was good enough for them and thus is good enough for their children

Recommendations

The three focus groups of Community, School, and Parents represented three key stakeholder groups that are actively involved with children, youth, and family activities and needs in Page County. They represented various health and wellness support groups, civic organizations, youth and recreation organizations, school personnel and parents very active in school activities. Although conducted separately, all three focus groups identified similar strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they relate to health and wellness issues, crime and violence prevention, and community involvement.

Based on the input received from the three focus groups, BTILLC has identified four (4) critical recommendations for Page County Public Schools to consider. To be most effective, the school system should develop a plan and collaborate with the county government, civic groups, health and wellness agencies, law enforcement, and other key stakeholders to develop strategies to phase in these recommendations. BTILLC has not prioritized the recommendations listed in this report, but rather listed them in no specific order.

1. The historical and cultural differences that are inherent with the residents of each town in Page County must not be a barrier for residents being involved in school and community activities and services.

All three focus groups identified that the towns of Luray, Stanley and Shenandoah function differently and that the residents of the towns hold different beliefs and values. The participants of the focus groups felt that most public and private activities and services take place in Luray and that the towns of Stanley and Shenandoah are often treated differently. The groups described how the people Stanley and Shenandoah think and act differently and that the residents of those communities do not have as much access to activities and services as do the residents of Luray. BTILLC's research supports the fact that Luray is the center of activity and services in Page County and that a different mindset does exist in each community. The lack of key services within a community leads to citizen apathy. For example, the people in Stanley, Shenandoah or Luray are not concerned if the other communities do not have the same services or activities as they have. It appears that extracurricular activities vary greatly from school to school and that these activities are usually championed by a particular teacher or coach. If the teacher leaves the school, the activity stops. Non-athletic students feel that there are few activities for them.

While it may be impossible for Page County to change the regional mindset of the residents that has evolved since their founding of each of these communities, it is important that Page County identify and implement means to build relationships and partnerships within each community and with the residents of the other communities. Page County needs to identify and communicate the needs of each community to the others. This shared understanding will encourage the citizens to become more involved in activities and services and are more willing to volunteer in activities and services.

2. The disparity in services between the three towns in Page County needs to be eliminated.

One of the resounding points made by the participants in all three focus groups was that Luray is the benefactor of most health and wellness services and community youth activity centers for Page County. While Luray citizens have more services than the other regions of Page County, they lack key centers and services to meet the needs of Page County youth. Luray has a relatively new recreation center and several churches that sponsor after school programs. Luray also has an active 4-H program. The towns of Stanley and Shenandoah have a shortage of these types of programs for their youth. There are very few programs available throughout the county for those youth who are not interested in athletics. There is a very active scouting program throughout the county.

It is not possible to have an equal amount of service offices with equal staff in each of the three towns of the county. Luray is the county seat and typically the major health and wellness services are located in the county seat. However, this fact does not preclude these agencies from establishing satellite facilities with smaller staffs in the other two communities. These services could be located in the same facility and house services like mental health, nutrition and dietary counseling, substance abuse, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and volunteer literacy. By increasing these services in Stanley and Shenandoah, the residents who are not able to or willing to travel to Luray are more likely to use these services because they are located in their community.

It is unlikely that the proportion of people employed outside of Page County is going to change in the near future or that the average commute time of 32 minutes twice each day will change. This work arrangement is necessary since the jobs are not available inside the county. Therefore, it is important to increase the number of available before and after school programs within each community. The programs can be housed in schools, churches, recreation and community centers. It is also important to increase the number of child care facilities to take

care of the number of children who need supervision before or after school when the parents are not a home. It is not necessary that one model fits all three communities as to the type of facility or program offerings, but that each community provides a well balanced series of programs in a well supervised facility with qualify staff. Centers staffed with well-trained personnel offering high quality programs provide an excellent opportunity to curb gang and drug influence by providing peer and other mentoring options, and alternative activities for youth whose needs are not met by limited options.

All three focus groups felt that the reason that many Page County youth and their parents do not participate in school activities or seek out county services is because of the lack of good public transportation within each of its three towns, as well as between towns. It is important to provide after school activity buses to transport youth to community and church centers. It is also necessary to provide transportation for youth wishing to participate in extracurricular and sports activities who do not drive or cannot be picked up by parents whose work schedules conflict with the activity's schedule. Public transportation does not exist for residents who need transportation to school events or meetings.

3. There is a need to update/modernize or implement health and wellness and school safety curriculum necessary to educate students and parents.

Overwhelmingly, the participants of all three focus groups spoke of the need to either update certain school curriculum or implement other needed curriculum that will teach students and parents about health and wellness issues and school safety. They reported that it appeared to them that some necessary curriculum was missing at the elementary level and that some of the high school curriculum was outdated and did not engage the students in the educational process. In addition to the appropriateness of the curriculum, the participants expressed concern regarding the new way the school system grouped children at the building level. All three focus groups felt that the students in grades six through eight were not placed in schools to optimally support the social and emotional development of middle grade children.

The data gathered during the parent's focus group showed that the parents were not aware of the magnitude of or potential for gang or drug problems. If a representative body of actively involved parents is not aware of the critical problems that face their children each day, then what is the level of understanding of those parents who are not engaged in school activities? The biggest targets for gang recruiters are at-risk youth or youth that feel disenfranchised.

These youth have a greater tendency to join antisocial activities, such as gangs or become involved in drugs.

The parent's focus group, in particular, mentioned that there are a growing number of parents who do not provide good role models for their children. For example, they mentioned that some parents grow up in a drug culture and that these parents share recreational drugs with their children as a family activity. They also mentioned that there are a large number of parents who are reluctant to talk with their children about health and wellness issues or crime and violence.

Each focus group emphasized that the Family Life curriculum was outdated and failed to motivate and engage students in the learning process. The participants felt that the curriculum needs to be modernized using technology that the students use daily. In 2006, Page County had 37 teenage pregnancies, an extremely high number of pregnancies for the population of ages 10-19.

In addition, the participants of each focus group felt that health and wellness issues and crime and violence prevention must start in elementary school and continue throughout high school. Besides improving the Family Life curriculum, the participants identified the importance of adding a bullying curriculum, gang awareness programs, child safety and violence prevention education, and conflict resolution into the school curriculum. The participants were concerned about the lack of physical education and recreation that students receive at school, especially at the elementary level. They recommended that a DARE program officer be assigned to each school.

Focus groups reported that there is either misinformation or lack of information for parents regarding children's need for academic and career guidance. This problem leads to parents' lack of trust in the school system to know what is in the best interest for the children. Regardless of the child's ability, the participants feel that the school system must provide opportunities for all students to reach their potential. Students typically not thought of as college caliber, but who have the ability to succeed in college are not encouraged to pursue college. It is important to help inform parents who do not have the experience, skills or knowledge to learn about scholarship and other financial opportunities that would help pay for their child's college education. It is also important to help students understand that not all students need to go to college to have successful careers.

4. There is a need to provide more opportunities for mentoring and ways in increase volunteerism.

The participants of the focus groups repeatedly mentioned the need to provide mentoring opportunities to provide positive role models for the county youth. There is a lack of mentoring programs in 6th, 7th and 8th grades, crucial years when youth can easily be influenced to gain acceptance in a group. All focus groups emphasized that Page County needs to find ways to utilize its residents more creatively as role models sharing their expertise with the county youth. They also highlighted the unwillingness of parents to participate in school activities or volunteer in the school or with community activities, a threat that must be considered. It appears that PTA's are only active in a small percentage of schools and in some school they are almost totally inactive. PTA's provide a vehicle for gaining the support of parents and getting them involved in school activities.

The school district needs to collaborate with its key stakeholders to develop activities in community, recreational center, after school programs and other community organizations and agencies reinforce the school curriculum. These activities provide places for youth to meet and interact other youth who provide good role models for them. Involving key community leaders who provide role models or serve as mentors should help youth understand what is possible if they apply themselves. The growing number of retirees and seniors, as well as other available citizens should be encouraged to become involved in school and community organizations to help them conduct special programs for students.

Summary

The school district cannot solve all of these programs by itself. School personnel must collaborate with community-based support groups that include health and wellness centers and agencies, after school programs, recreation centers, law enforcement and other key stakeholders that can provide resources, curriculum, workshops and programs not taught in the school system. These educational and service opportunities must take place in each of the three communities in Page County. The key is to provide opportunities for all students that allow students to be involved in activities that meet their needs and interests.

If youth are not supervised properly before or after school or do not have facilities to available to them where they can participate in organized activities, they are more likely to be influenced by those recruiting youth for gangs, pushing drugs and alcohol and encouraging negative

behavior. When children feel excluded or see the residents of their community apathetic or uninvolved in their community, they have a greater tendency to turn to negative behavior. It is the responsibility of the entire community to provide the nurturing environment in which the children can flourish and reach their full potential.

Barnes Technologies International, LLC

Originally established as the International Institute for the Study of Technology in 1985, Barnes Technologies International LLC (BTILLC), a woman-owned technology small business, has become an internationally recognized leader in technology economic development, urban planning, assessments and third party evaluations. Susan K. Barnes, Managing Director of Operations and James L. Barnes, Managing Director of Research lead BTILLC. The staff is comprised of a cadre of worldwide associates with a plethora of expertise and experience. BTILLC integrates its highly capable and technically competent staff in order to tailor its services specifically to suit each client's needs.

BTILLC has conducted training and education related program development and activities, nationally and internationally (United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Belgium, Netherlands, Canada, and United States), for universities, Ministries of Education, State Departments of Education, school districts, and corporations. BTILLC's staff has served as project directors and consultants to over 30 leadership/curriculum development projects and educational reform movements. BTILLC's staff has conducted numerous research projects, nationally and internationally, on problem solving and a framework for the study of technology. Their staff is actively involved in leadership at local, state, national, and international technology, education, evaluation and assessment, and training associations and organizations. This leadership included testifying before state and national technology, science, and educational hearings.

Recent clients include the U.S. Department of Education, Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia Department of Education, Success By Six Coalition, and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham United Way.

BTILLC is dedicated to providing the highest quality of technology economic development, evaluation and assessment to improve client productivity and efficiency. BTILLC's work product is design around four key competencies:

Assessment and Measurement

BTILLC helps companies and educational institutions to measure their efficiency and performance. BTILLC will custom design reliable and validated instruments to uniquely assess or evaluate growth. BTILLC uses these instruments to conduct research studies, needs assessments, and third-party evaluations to yield a thorough assessment or evaluation of needs.

BTI LLC is committed to providing companies and educational institutions will quality assessments and evaluations through:

Research Studies. BTILLC helps educational institutions and companies understand global impacts and consequences due to political, economic, social and technological change. BTI LLC will conduct qualitative and quantitative research studies to examine:

- Technological change.
- Public opinion about technology.
- Technology and the future.

Needs Assessment. BTILLC helps educational institutions and companies assess expected learning, behavior and performance, economic cost and benefits of proposed projects and options for desired change. BTILLC will conduct custom needs assessment to determine:

- Programmatic needs.
- Performance improvement and training needs.
- Curriculum needs.

Program Assessment and Evaluation. BTILLC conducts third party evaluations in educational and corporate settings for curriculum implementation, training programs to assess standards performance and effectiveness. BTILLC will conduct custom third party evaluations of:

- Training programs.
- Curriculum innovations and implementations.
- Standards and quality assessment.

Education and Training

Providing the appropriate learning environment to facilitate the learning process is critical to student and workforce learning. BTILLC will custom design and implement educational and

training workshops in curriculum development, technological literacy, national standards, cooperative learning, team building, problem solving, and critical thinking.

Train-the Trainer. BTILLC will custom design and implement educational and training workshops in curriculum development, technological literacy, national standards, cooperative learning and team building. BTILLC will conduct custom train-the trainer workshops in:

- Technological awareness.
- Technology education.
- Quality improvement.
- National and state educational standards.
- Problem solving.

Team Building. BTILLC helps educational institutions improve the teaching and learning process and helps companies improve efficiency through innovative seminars and workshops. BTILLC will conduct custom seminars and workshops in:

- Team teaching.
- Quality teaming.
- Cooperative learning.
- Collaborative learning.

Curriculum Development

Designing curriculum that is interactive and addresses learner's needs and diversity is key to educating and training students or the workforce. BTILLC will develop standards-based curriculum (E-Learning, On-Demand Learning, Computer-Assisted Learning, or traditional printed) for educational settings and training materials for corporate settings.

BTILLC will develop standards-based curriculum for educational settings and training materials for corporate settings. BTILLC will develop custom educational and training materials that include:

- E-Learning.
- On-Demand Learning.
- Computer-Assisted Learning.
- Curriculum guides.
- Instructor guides.
- Training guides.

Economic Development

BTILLC recognizes that proper planning and design ensures incubators and accelerators a greater chance of realizing their dream. Clearly focusing on the ideal economic cluster or concept for an incubator or accelerator aids the facility design process, goal setting and strategies to move from concept to reality. BTILLC works closely with private and public groups wishing to establish an incubator or accelerator to provide new economic base. BTILLC also works with entrepreneurs who wish to locate in an incubator, accelerator, or technology zone.

Technology Development. BTILLC helps companies, especially small businesses, to:

- Develop results-oriented approaches to innovation.
- Use incubation as a tool for success.
- Transfer technology from the company or university.

Incubator/Accelerator Planning. BTILLC helps public or private groups or agencies to:

- Identify the most appropriate focus or cluster for an incubator or accelerator.
- Match the incubator or accelerator focus or cluster with the appropriate facility design.
- Develop strategies for identifying and securing the correct mix of companies for success.
- Develop a long-term sustainable plan and revenue model.

Entrepreneurial Strategic Planning. BTILLC helps companies, especially small businesses, to:

- Create, shape, recognize, and seize the correct opportunity for your product or service.
- Understand the entrepreneurial process.
- Manage for rapid growth, plateaus, and new markets.

Key Personnel

Susan K. Barnes, Managing Director of Operations. Mrs. Barnes has over fifteen years of experience in early childhood education and assessment and evaluation. She became Managing Director of Operations of BTILLC when the company moved from Michigan to Virginia. Mrs. Barnes specializes in instrument design and data analysis. Mrs. Barnes is also an instructor of early childhood education at James Madison University, an adjunct instructor at Blue Ridge Community College, and is currently a doctoral candidate in assessment and measurement at James Madison. She has taught pre-school and elementary education both in public and private schools. Mrs. Barnes has served as the lead teacher at the International Pre-School of The University of Michigan. She also teaches for the Virginia Department of Social Services. Mrs. Barnes has served as a third-party evaluator for numerous BTILLC projects that

include the Ford Motor Company's targeted training programs, U.S. Department of Education No Child Left Behind, Success By Six, and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham United Way. Mrs. Barnes has an earned A.B in Education and an A.M. in Educational Studies from The University of Michigan.

James L. Barnes, Managing Director of Research. As Managing Director of Research, Dr. Barnes oversees all proposal development and research design. He coordinates all needs assessment and benchmarking studies. Dr. Barnes is also the Assistant Economic Development Director for Technology for the City of Harrisonburg, Professor of Integrated Science and Technology, and Director of NASA RISE at James Madison University. He has worked in the science and technology field for over thirty-three years. Dr. Barnes is also a co-principal of Barnes Technologies International LLC. Prior to joining the faculty at James Madison University, Dr. Barnes was the Director of NASA RISE, a NASA research institute at Eastern Michigan University. Dr. Barnes has also directed a technology research center at The University of Texas at Austin and has served as President and CEO of two technology research companies. Dr. Barnes earned his bachelor's and doctorate at Virginia Tech and his masters at Virginia State University. Dr. Barnes has conducted many research projects, published numerous articles and has authored several books in his research area of Innovation, Problem Solving and Technology Transfer.

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