STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS – FOCUS GROUPS

May 20, 2014

Introduction
As part of the strategic planning process for the CUEP, 26 focus groups (about 220 people, including faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members) were conducted by CUEP staff from September 2013 to October 2013. Except for one session, each focus group session included at least two CUEP staff, and food and refreshments were provided. At each focus group, we asked participants for their permission to record the conversation for transcription purposes and assured the confidentiality of their identities. Drs. Mary Rose and Jim Penrod selected responses and themes to share with the Strategic Planning Team to inform and foster discussions in the development of the Strategic Plan; full transcripts were available to the Team at any time.

In each focus group we asked four general questions:

- How would you define “urban education”?
- What are the critical issues affecting the academic success of students in urban schools or areas?
- What are the most effective ways to improve academic outcomes for these students?
- What role could UNF/CUEP play in addressing these issues?

Additional questions were asked of middle/high school students and faculty/staff of the College of Education and Human Services (COEHS).

K-12 students were also asked:

- How would you describe students who do well in school?
- How would you describe students who don’t do well?
- What makes a good teacher?
- What makes a poor teacher?

Furthermore, COEHS faculty and staff were also asked:

- What role should faculty and the COEHS play in supporting the work of the CUEP; and
- What critical educational research areas should be addressed which maximize the expertise of the COEHS and UNF faculty?

Highlights from focus groups are presented by each location where sessions were conducted.
Highlights

1. **UNF College of Education and Human Services Faculty & Staff** (2 groups)
   - “Urban” is not a set location, it involves the students and families that are at a disadvantage and are poverty stricken. The disconnect between the community and the school systems affects student success.
   - Critical factors: Achievement gaps are evident, such as between grades and standardized test scores; poverty and lack of parent involvement.
   - Role of UNF/CUEP: A place to connect people and ideas, engage UNF students, and conduct quality research. CUEP should use the media to share COEHS research.

2. **Abyssinia Missionary Baptist Church & AnnieRuth Foundation** (2 groups)
   - Urban education involves minority groups with personal issues that the system does not address, disadvantages, and lack of opportunities.
   - Critical factors: Home and community involvement, disconnects between policies set at state and federal levels and implementation at the school level, first generation college students need help with transition to college, including dealing with culture shock, relationship between teachers (and other school staff) and students beyond classroom learning, who have a positive attitude toward students.
   - Important issues at school: disorganized structure/communication, bullying (teachers should pay more attention), gun violence and fighting, too much work and not enough down time, teen pregnancies, and favoritism of student-athletes, teachers who do not have control over large classes.
   - School should be a comfort zone where students feel safe and teachers hold all students to high expectations; use media to exert positive pressure to do well in school and start early.
   - Role of UNF/CUEP: shift focus from sports to education, offer workforce development programs, create youth mentor and tutor programs, increase parent support, and offer more scholarships.

3. **Community Connections**
   - Urban education is related to negativity, not enough funding, poverty, lack of parent engagement, behavior issues, and is based on location.
   - The factors that impact academic success of students in urban areas are lack of discipline at home and in school, and teachers assuming students have access to technology.
   - Effective ways to improve academic outcomes for urban students are to provide positive reinforcement and transportation to and from tutoring.
   - UNF and CUEP can offer teaching internships at urban schools, advocate on behalf of urban schools, and support families so children can afford to go to school.

4. **DCPS District Staff** (2 groups)
   - Urban education is where large populations from the heart of the city see violence, lack of parent engagement, and many challenges; people of color living in the inner-city with low income; badly performing children.
• Challenges of urban context impact student success: homelessness, generational poverty, lack of parenting skills and family management, low achievement, structural disadvantages, little hope, absence of positive feedback, incarceration rates, parents do not know about resources that exist
• Improve academic success by increasing rewards, educating teachers on urban kids, address the sense of belonging, and having high expectations for youth, helping parents to help their children through training, support, and involvement
• UNF/CUEP could connect the community to resources (such as businesses) and bring together all the universities to change urban education

5. UNF First Generation College Students
• Thoughts on UNF as students from urban schools/areas: It’s not too big, students can get personal attention from professors, professors teach students on what they need to know. Parking could be better and UNF should have a football team.
• Role of UNF/CUEP: Coordinate a college fair in the inner city, educate citizens of Jacksonville about college (specifically UNF) and get more Black students to attend college, preferably earlier
• Students hoped this conversation would change the way of life for Black students at UNF and encourage more Black students to attend college

6. Ed White High School (2 groups)
• Urban education is low-funded schools with people who don’t care about students, contains a large student population, usually overcrowded, students are not as successful, low socioeconomic conditions, large city, better opportunities than previous circumstances
• Critical factors that impact student success are generational poverty, homelessness, lack of exposure to different environments and perspectives, family management, positive experiences, positive reinforcement, building a relationship with the kids, elaborating on the importance of education, going against being known as a “sell out” if you do well in school, pushing teachers to give more time to the students, insufficient resources, lack of hope and opportunity
• Potential solutions are positive reinforcement (rewards), increase the access to facilities, change their mentalities, incorporate topics they’re interested in during school, have a relationship with the kids, focus on real life experiences (not just school/book focused), and to build trust with the kids
• Parents are challenged with showing their children that education is important, helping them realize they have opportunities and overcome barriers, providing hope, going beyond a high school diploma, helping them overcome barriers, pushing teachers to give more to the youth (like time), building a relationship with the kids, elaborating on the importance of education, going against being known as a “sell out”
• Administration tries to make the education as best it can be and the activities are fun but students don’t feel safe and feel their school has a bad reputation
• Students who do well don’t care what others think of them, control their temper, work with what they’ve got, are self-motivated, and have a strong work ethic. Students who don’t do well are dealing with issues such as built up anger and issues at home
• A good teacher is creative, caring, goes the extra mile, motivates, is inspirational, strict, knows the material, and earns respect through friendship
• Role of UNF/CUEP: Be at the school consistently, coordinate communication between the schools and the university, allowing students to see firsthand what college is like and help them pursue different opportunities (like internships, shadowing a college student)

7. Englewood High School
• Urban education is associated with public schools, the city, ghetto, free/reduced lunch, modern technology, mixed cultures, and overcrowding. Englewood is an urban school with a diverse population. You can clearly tell it is urban by how the students act and there is also overcrowding in the classrooms.
• Students struggle because of how [little] they know English, playing around and not focusing, trouble learning, no motivation, not taking school seriously, their pride, not asking for help, not getting support from home, parents who don’t care, teacher who don’t care, making excuses, their surroundings, wanting to impress people, and not thinking success is a self-choice
• Students are motivated to learn and go to college so that they can be better than the family member before them, so that they will not have to struggle, and to be successful in life
• Things that help students are teachers trying to help you learn, teachers that understand each students learning style, knowing where you want to go in life. Not helpful: lack of incentives, society and peer pressure (like skipping school, drugs)
• Role of UNF/CUEP: Mentor high school students and field trips to college campus

8. Full Service Schools
• Urban education: Negative connotations associated with different cultures in a disadvantaged neighborhood where children are not treated equally and are not expected to perform
• Critical factors: Lack of technology, lots of stigmas, good teachers (committed), resources, accessibility, family support, teachers are supported by administration and parents
• Teacher training: Have them walk through the life of an urban child and see their circumstances first hand
• Role of UNF/CUEP: Getting involved with the teacher’s academy for a diversity training to help the teachers learn about the kids and their learning style

9. Andrew Jackson High School (3 groups)
• Urban education: Black community, inner city, mix of people but different levels of poverty, Black people, minority people, lots of people in an area, lower standards for urban education, Trying to get poverty stricken minority students to graduate with a lack of resources and parent involvement. Teachers are playing catch up and students aren’t able to read.
• Critical factors: Help at home, tutoring, community support, funding/resources, mentors, lack of resources, disorder, no positivity, no feeling of empowerment for teachers, and people from the district with no/little experience for urban schools, personal problems (ex. death in the family), distractions (ex. boy/girlfriend), the bad environment of the school, and fighting/drama between students, teachers, peer pressure from class
• Parents involved because: Love for my community, believe they can help. There is so much negative reinforcement, there needs to be a reward system (ex. Praising grandparent that get involved)
• Like about their school: Strictly urban, there is potential in the classrooms, the teachers and the community; teachers are involved in students’ lives outside of classroom
• Students who do well have ambition and patience, a good support system and family involvement, and goals and their priorities right. Students who don’t do well choose to not do well since the work is so easy. They either don’t come to school, don’t have parent involvement, or are focused on the streets rather than school.
• The things that can make the school better are: more funding, kids respecting adults, staff understanding their personal lives and acting as support, school spirit, people taking education more seriously, more rewards, after school activities, and school security. The most effective ways to improve academic outcomes for urban students is to set high expectations while making realistic goals, having mentoring/support systems for teachers, to stop budget cutting, and more commitment from teachers
• Role of UNF/CUEP: Have college students visit the high schools, advertise scholarships, invite parents and students on campus, preparing teachers for urban education and minority students, preparing teachers for urban education, not just education, teaching students life skills and providing a mentor, help the district plan diversity trainings

10. UNF Jacksonville Commitment (2 groups)
• Urban education: negative connotations, lower scale, missing things: lack of teachers, kids shuffled through, education not up to par, failing poor schools, low expectations, brown and poor, lack of resources, negative connotations, teachers have to focus more on classroom management (controlling disruptive kids) than the material, disparity, high turnover rates among teachers, discredits issues and needs, targets brown and poor people, Minority, poor, probably F schools, mainly public schools, mainly on the North Side, Authority not caring, lack of resources, poor financing, lots of stigmas, there is little support if you don’t show potential
• Reality: Realities differ by schools; too much emphasis on FCAT, schools are understaffed, lots of changes without preparation, teachers are not respected, students don’t want to be teachers
• Critical factors: Motivation and encouragement from parents; if you go to an F school, no one cares about the school; students need to know it is possible for them to attend college, Jacksonville Commitment scholarship, starting early and getting on and staying on track
• Obstacles to success: students’ circumstances (ex. Having to help take care of their family so they choose to work), not having support system, not prepared for college, Labels placed on you earlier due to choices made when you were younger
• Possible solutions: Emphasis on connecting to the real world as opposed to testing, field trips, hands-on learning, fearlessness in making changes, passionate teachers, respect for teachers, creating critical thinkers
• Role of UNF/CUEP: Cultural, reinstitute programs, intervention & enrichment programs targeting students from urban schools (ex. AVID, TRIO, Upward Bound); gifted and talented programs; mentorship with teachers; adopting schools and having a presence there; bring students to UNF; mentoring programs; helping students decide on college and helping them connect with others; having more students at UNF from local urban high schools
11. Operation New Hope
- Urban education: Defined by culture, poverty, ethnicity, lower class, higher crime rates, lack of resources, location. It deals with a culture that is in poverty, in public schools, in the inner city, and it does not depend solely on race
- Critical factors: Parental involvement, early learning, and lack of exposure to critical information (ex. scholarships)
- Role of UNF/CUEP: Provide parent workshops in the urban community to teach parents how to get involved with their child’s school and education.

12. S.P. Livingston Elementary School
- Urban education: Areas where they need help the most, associated with diversity, the inner-city, different cultures, inequality, negative stereotypes of children who go to urban schools
- Possible solutions: Authority having a positive influence on kids, give them basic skills (not depend on technology), give the school all the supplies they needed, get more advanced equipment (technology), make the staff experience the urban lifestyles, and have children positively influence other children, community raises the kids not just the parents, have a passion for helping kids, don’t be a pushover, and be able to take criticism.
- Like about S.P Livingston: Personal relationships (teacher to student, teacher to parent); One teacher there in particular goes beyond her necessary duties (supporting parents, providing personal supplies). The parents in the organization are doing great things for the school and supporting teachers.
- Successful teachers: Needs material to teach his/her kids, be able to communicate about the child to the parent and the principal

13. Edward Waters College SEC Mentors
- Urban Education: Involves schools in bad neighborhoods full of minority kids from the inner-city that get a different quality of education.
- Critical factors: One on one attention, trust issues towards peers and adult figures, not having quality mentors, having behavior issues, and distractions (clubs, peer pressure)
- College success: Before going to college, students should research everything about the school. While in school they should maintain self-determination, stay focused, and have successful role models
- Role of UNF/CUEP: Collaborate, communicate, and share their resources (speakers, networks)

14. Frank H. Peterson Academies of Technology (2 groups)
- Urban education: Crowded public schools, not advanced education, inner city schools, low expectation, failing students, and a unique culture
- Critical factors: Teachers who find it hard to relate to students, parental involvement, more diversity training, mentors and role models for students, not enough funds, and alien
- Like about your school: Career certificates are given when you graduate, sense of community in the school, a lot of teachers (personal relationships), motivation is given
- Dislike about your school: No normal sports, all the testing (FCAT and PERT testing), teachers don’t understand the PERT tests
• Students who do well: Are motivated, encouraged by teachers and guidance counselors, stay focused, get tutored, teachers are hands-on and provide a relaxed and balanced class environment
• Students who don’t do well: Teachers who give up on students, students who give up on themselves
• Possible solutions: Have parent involvement, make students accountable, raise expectations for everyone, have more diversity training, less testing, and more career exploration for students.
• Role of UNF/CUEP: Have a group activity day at the school. Do things to help students at school. Have people who already graduated from the school in a certain major come to talk to the students for college day. There is disconnect between what teachers learn in college and the reality. The solution would be to give more internship, to provide training for diversity, and for school district to support teachers more

15. Portside Mobile Home Park
• Students who do well: Participate in honor classes, sit in front of the class, are quiet, have their priorities together, go to tutoring, and have little friends
• Students who don’t do well: Don’t pay attention, are not preparing themselves, do not care, and get distracted by technology devices and boy/girlfriends
• Good teachers: Doesn’t only teach from the book, is encouraging, is present on a regular basis, explain something until every student understands, and is committed
• Role of CUEP/UNF: Have college students and interns help in the classroom and help with homework