

## WE C.A.N. Network | Southlawn Report

### Overview

The We C.A.N. Network is a grassroots community engagement strategy adapted by the Montgomery Education Foundation (MEF). The Network creates a space for all stakeholders in the community – including school leaders, educators, students, parents, local business owners, neighborhood associations, clergy, and civic leaders – to share their vision and goals for strong and healthy schools and thus, stronger and healthier communities. The Network aims to leverage community voice and action to benefit Montgomery public schools. These regularly held meetings, known as Network Nights, follow a prescriptive agenda that first identifies community concerns, challenges, goals, and/or opportunities. Network Nights also provide the opportunity to ensure connections are made by identifying the need and then leveraging the connections, assets, and resources of every person in attendance to take the next steps meet the needs. All attendees are encouraged to turn their vision into action by connecting with one another and creating action plans to be continued outside of the event. The Network asks those in attendance to rally around one message: connect the community, accept the challenge, with no excuses.

The primary goal of the We C.A.N. Network is to promote engaging, intentional community dialogue at the epicenter of our neighborhoods – the schools – and encourage sustainable action and efforts from community stakeholders in order foster more successful outcomes for Montgomery Public School students.

### **Background**

In the fall of 2015, with MEF's ongoing focus on community engagement, the MEF staff began to explore models to incorporate the two most critical factors to effective community engagement: the community voice and community action. These models were built on best practices and a sustainable foundation – one that first asked of the community their vision for shared work and next allowed for the planning of that work to take place with achievable steps. A model being used by the Birmingham Education Foundation allowed MEF and MPS staff to observe this work in action. MEF arranged for Montgomery County Public Schools' (MPS) Office of Community Schools to join in this exploration and development process in the spring of 2016.

Ultimately, this led to a final partnership agreement in which the terms and responsibilities of each party were established. The pilot will include at least 5 Network Nights events in two MPS feeder patterns by the conclusion of the 2016-2017 school year. MEF will support the planning, advertisement and promotion of the We C.A.N. Network, design the overall research strategy during the pilot phase, purchase necessary materials/supplies for designated promotional and program materials, design any survey instruments, protocols and survey database, provide training sessions, program supports, implementation, facilitation and oversight of Network Nights events and analyze survey data and produce a final report representing findings. The duties and responsibilities of MPS include recruitment and identification of Network Night program participants and volunteers, granting permits and providing use of appropriate facilities for project activities during the hours in which facilities are staffed, disseminating project information to personnel, parents, and community members as provided, and collaborating on training sessions, program supports, implementation, facilitation and oversight.

## **NETWORK NIGHT MODEL**

Each Network Night is scheduled on a Thursday evening at 5:30 p.m. to take place at a Montgomery public school with assistance in the planning and facilities assistance from the school principal and MPS staff. Participants are offered free food provided by a local business and free childcare as arranged by the Office of Community Schools. Facilitated by a the “Network Host”, a trained MEF and/or MPS staff member, each We C.A.N. Network Night follows a specified agenda:

### **CALL TO THE CIRCLE**

- The Network Host will convene everyone in attendance into one large circle with the host standing in the center.

### **NOW OR WOW**

- Each participant in the circle will take 15 seconds to tell the room their name and something new, good, or exciting happening in their lives.
- Ex: “I received a promotion at my job today!”, “My math lesson was very exciting and engaging for my students”, “I received an A+ on my English term paper.”

### **SHARE-A-CARE**

- At this time, anyone in the room is open to suggest a topic for a small group discussion. That person will host a 20 minute discussion about this topic and identify next steps to address this goal or challenge.
  - Ex.: “Early Childhood Education”, “Afterschool Arts programs”, “Growing the PTA”, “Community Beautification”

- Participants will chose their small group based on their own interest and will participate in the discussion.
- The host will share the highlights of their small group discussion and their next steps back out with the entire audience.

#### COMMUNITY CONNECT

- Community Connect serves as a marketplace for individual needs, offers, resources, and opportunities. Every participant will have the chance to make their own offer, request, or declaration.
- The Network Host will pass the mic to each person in the audience, giving them 30 or 60 seconds to explain their offer, request, or declaration.
  - Ex. A request: "I am looking for scholarships for college. Can anyone help me find these?", "I want to add new books to my classroom library. Can you contribute?"
  - Ex. An offer: "My business will be sponsoring haircuts for students on honor roll.", "Our non-profit is offering free tutoring afterschool.", "My company is hiring new employees and offering on the job training."
  - Ex. A declaration: "I am declaring I will be contacting the principal in this school about volunteering.", "I declare that each of my students will complete our classroom novel this year."
- Following offers and requests, any audience can "match" with that individual. These matches are recorded and will allow each individual to work together.

#### MATCH AND ACT

- Following Community Connect, the participants will break up and meet with one another face to face to exchange "Match and Act Cards" with their contact information and determine the next steps to deliver on their request or offer.

#### SURVEY COLLECTION/PRINCIPAL DEBRIEF

- Each participant is given a survey to complete and drop off upon exiting.
- MEF's Director of Research and Development executes a rapid fire response debrief with the principal of the host school and other principal's in attendance from the feeder pattern in order to capture their feedback on the success and outcomes from the Network Night.

## SOUTHLAWN NETWORK NIGHT

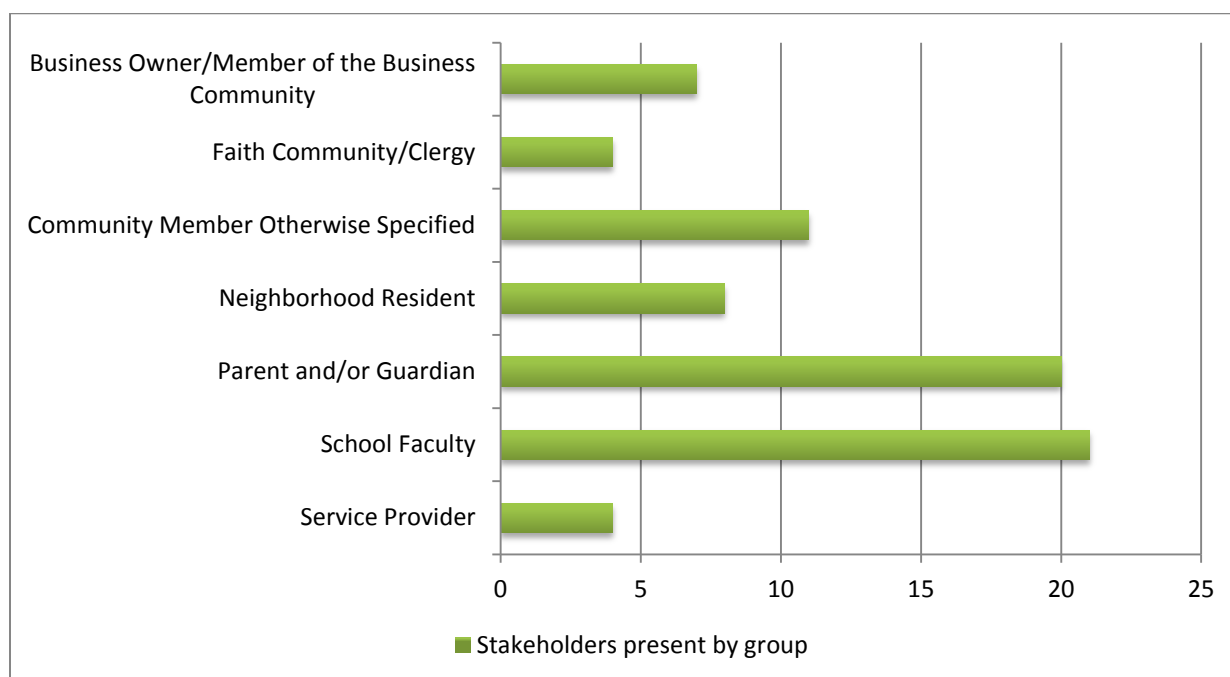
We C.A.N Network Night took place on Thursday, January 19, at Southlawn Elementary. The following information was collected by MEF and MPS staff in order to gather data which will be assessed and offered as deliverables to every participant, school leadership, the Montgomery County Public Schools' Superintendent, and the Montgomery County Board of Education.

### *Attendance*

Total attendance: 67

Attendees were asked to sign in upon arrival. The following stakeholders identified their affiliated groups and were able to select from the groups represented in the following graph.

\*Note: attendees were able to select "all that apply" to their identity.



A total of 12 diverse community organizations and businesses were represented:

#### **BONDS**

Capitol Heights Civic Association  
 Capitol Heights United Methodist Church  
 Gift of Life Foundation  
 District 4 City Council  
 Emerge Montgomery  
 Miss Black USA  
 Operation Evolve  
 Southlawn Community Association

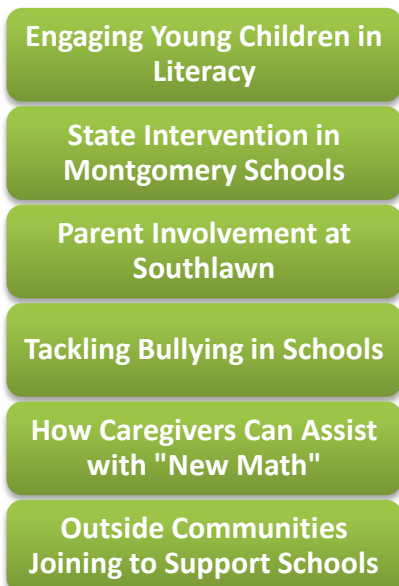
#### **That's My Child**

Women of Refined Gold  
 Youth and Family Life



### *Business of the Network*

Discussions that took place during the **Share-A-Care** segment ranged from afterschool enrichment to church-based support for school; see complete list below:



Over **28** matches were made during **Community Connect**. Offers and requests ranged from job opportunities to tutoring assistance and creating new community groups geared toward student success. Below are a few selected examples with their outcomes:



### Survey Results

MEF's Coordinator of Research and Development developed a survey which was voluntarily completed at the conclusion of Network Night. In addition to surveying participants, a rapid-response debrief was carried out with the principal and/or senior staff of the host school. The following questions offered in the survey were answered by 20 attendees:

<b>70%</b>	<b>Of participants surveyed made a "match" with another participant</b>
<b>100%</b>	<b>Know of or have a student enrolled in Montgomery County Public Schools</b>
<b>100%</b>	<b>Agreed that they would attend Network Night again</b>
<b>100%</b>	<b>Stated they would encourage others to join the Network and will attend future events</b>
<b>100%</b>	<b>Found Network Night to be VERY useful</b>

**"This was a great event! Continue  
and this will get bigger and better!"**  
-Anonymous Network Night  
Attendee

**"This event shows it does take a  
village to support children and  
their schools."**  
Mrs. Winston, Southlawn  
Elementary Principal

**"I attended the We C.A.N. Network  
and spoke to a lot of parents at  
Southlawn. They are concerned with  
what's going on in the community and  
I got to talk to them about them.  
That's the way we as a board should  
be reaching out to parents."**  
- Mary Briers, District 4 Board of  
Education

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Planning***

- Prioritize alumni attendance for the host school
- Ensure one representative from the superintendent's office is always present
- Engage business and faith community earlier in order to raise turnout from those groups
- Expand list of businesses, community groups, and civic leaders to invite
- Focus on identifying diverse non-profits/service providers
- Improve volunteer outreach
  - Enlist additional volunteers for childcare room
- Order food separately for childcare room
- Solicit prize donations from local businesses
- Engage educators and highlight specific benefits for their network night attendance (focusing on the Community Connect section)

### ***Logistics***

- Revise script in order to emphasize importance of the relationship between community and schools
- Create more tangible examples as each segment of the night is introduced to participants
- Better implement timing rules in order to improve flow of the event
- Maintain participant enthusiasm and event rules so that the environment is supportive consistently for everyone
- Adjust Share-A-Care notetaking sheet to highlight key action items
- Work with official food sponsor, That's My Dog, to create marketing materials

### ***Post Event***

- Review request/offers – inform service providers of community needs

### ***Evaluation***

- Continue to evaluate database efficiency