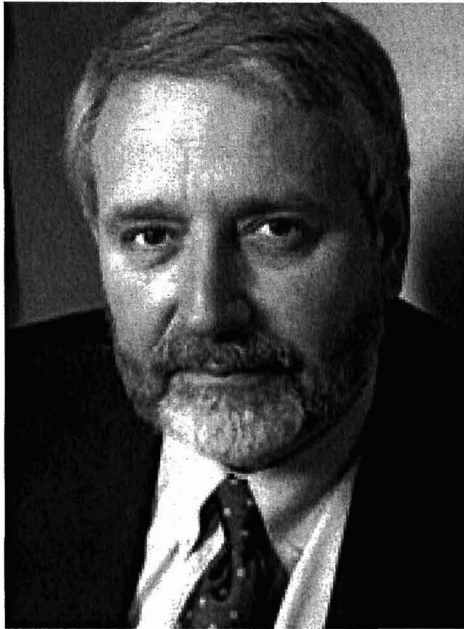


From Vision to Results**James E. Copple** *Founding Partner*

Expertise: Public Policy, Strategic Planning, Training and Facilitation, Community Coalition Building, Public Speaking, Organizational Development, Systems Improvement, Evaluation and Accountability, Government Relations, Communications, Fund Development

Content Knowledge: Gangs/Youth Violence Prevention, Juvenile Justice, Substance Abuse Prevention/Treatment, Education, Crime Prevention, Homeland Security, Public Health, HIV/AIDS, Methamphetamine, Criminal Justice, Service Learning, Mental Health

Full Biography: James E. Copple has a long and distinguished career in youth work, education, substance abuse, and crime and violence prevention. A nationally recognized speaker and writer in this field, Mr. Copple has served as the Founding President of Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the National Crime Prevention Council in Washington, D.C., and

most recently, Director of the International Institute for Alcohol Awareness a project affiliated with the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

Over the past ten years, Mr. Copple has facilitated 22 state-wide summits on Methamphetamine Prevention and Enforcement, numerous summits on violence prevention, gun prevention, and comprehensive planning on alcohol prevention among underage youth. He has delivered major addresses in every state of the union and spoken in twelve different nations, including a major facilitation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on youth substance abuse and violence prevention at the request of the State Dept.

Mr. Copple specializes in designing and implementing comprehensive health and safety system responses across local, state, and federal governments to address the major social issues of our day focusing on topics as diverse as Gang Prevention, Youth Substance Abuse, Youth Empowerment and Employment in the States and HIV/AIDS Prevention projects in Kenya, Swaziland and Zimbabwe. Mr. Copple was also the director of "Project Freedom," a local gang prevention coalition in Wichita, KS recognized nationally by Time Magazine for its innovative solutions to youth violence and substance abuse.

Mr. Copple has authored two major pieces of legislation, the Drug Free Communities Act and the Crime Free Rural State and Communities Act in the Department of Justice Reauthorization Bill. He regularly consults with states and communities on model state statutes and local ordinances related to drug abuse, gang violence, and underage drinking. While at NCPC, he played a major role in the design and implementation of Project Safe Neighborhoods.

Mr. Copple has done doctoral work in education at the University of Kansas and taught history at Eastern Nazarene College, and Boston College. He served as an adjunct professor of education at the Wichita State University and Special Assistant to the Superintendent of Schools in Wichita, Kansas. Mr. Copple is a teacher, trainer, speaker, mediator, facilitator, policy analyst, and national figure in the field of prevention. He loves sailing, reading, and spending time with his eight children and eleven grandchildren.

Mr. Copple is a member of the Alexandria Gang Prevention Task Force's School Drop-Out Prevention Committee.

MEMORANDUM AND WORKING DOCUMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Updated March 23, 2009 by Mike Mackey

TO: Members, Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force

FROM: Mike Mackey, Gang Prevention Coordinator
City of Alexandria

THROUGH: Mr. James Copple, Chair
Gang Prevention Community Task Force Subcommittee
High School Graduation/Drop-Out Rates

DATE: January 21, 2009

RE: Recommendations of Gang Prevention Community Task Force Subcommittee on
High School Graduation/Drop-Out Rates

On January 9, 2008, the Alexandria Gang Prevention Community Task Force directed the formation of a subcommittee to look at graduation, school attendance and drop-out rate issues. As you are aware, one of the Task Force’s overarching goals is to increase graduation rates in the City as a means of preventing gang involvement.

A richly diverse subcommittee - from the fields of education, law enforcement, program development, social services, mental health, parenthood, recreation, substance abuse, gang prevention, mentoring and probation - was formed to address this issue. Mr. James Copple, a founding and at-large representative of the Gang Prevention Community Task Force, agreed to lead this initiative and chaired the work of this subcommittee.

The group utilized a study completed by the Gates Foundation - “The Silent Epidemic” – to begin its discussion. This report indicated that 33% of students across the country are dropping out of high school.

The subcommittee began meeting on March 4, 2008, with a charge to research problem areas and present a series of recommendations to the Gang Prevention Community Task Force. Candid discussions occurred over the course of the following months; the group meeting 5 times over the spring and summer. Clustering its ideas, the group determined it would focus on 4 areas – the communication of resources, student re-entry, literacy and dissolution of casework silos. The following is a detailed description of each of the 4 focus areas and their recommendations.

1. COMMUNICATION OF RESOURCES

Communicating up-to-date resource information among community and school representatives is essential to provide accurate service provision to those in need of help. Led by Lillian Brooks, Director of the Court Service Unit, a “Dropout Prevention Exchange” exchange of information was added to an existing City and Schools Staff Group confidentiality

training on August 26, 2008. City agency and School program leaders provided 5 minute “speed trainings” to 150 City and School staff members on topics related to keeping kids in school. All of the information provided was intended to help “those who help” be better informed about the tools available to them in their work with families.

Providing this information on a regular basis to both new and seasoned City and School staff members aides in assuring that professionals charged with helping youth and families have the most up-to-date and accurate information available to them.

RECOMMENDATION – Provide an information exchange for City and School staff persons annually, at minimum.

2. STUDENT RE-ENTRY

This focus area centers on improving the manner in which those who have left school (e.g. due to incarceration, relocation, and illnesses) are reintegrated. The committee recognized the need to assist students in their return to a school environment. When students dropout or “dim out” of school, they need support as they return to environments that have not necessarily changed. There is a need to focus on a re-entry strategy that supports and promotes a student’s participation in school.

The Successful School Re-enrollment work group included representatives from the Alexandria Court Services Unit, the Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) Offices of Pupil Services and Secondary Programs, and all four ACPS secondary schools. Additional research was provided by Jaci Coachman, Office of Youth Services.

The group met in late August 2008 to discuss three issues:

1. the types of reasons students leave school
2. the barriers to their successful return to school
3. the steps needed to bring recommendations to the Dropout Prevention Subcommittee

With regards to the reasons students leave school, they include but are not limited to:

- family responsibilities
- suspension
- medical emergencies
- alternative site special education placement
- alternative site disciplinary placement
- involvement with Court Services
- boredom
- academic “fear” – concern with performance levels
- failure to see the relevance and importance of acquiring college and workforce ready skills and knowledge
- psycho-social stressors
- lack a sense of belonging

- belief that no one cares

Work in process:

1. The ACPS Special Education Department established “day treatment” programs on site at both middle schools beginning September 2008.
2. Once evaluated, these programs may also be established at Minnie Howard School and T. C. Williams High School.
3. The Alexandria Court Services Unit and ACPS is seeking funding to bring to George Washington Middle School an after school program that teaches students the art and science of video game production.
4. ACPS will complete its work late this fall on an action plan to streamline and improve guidance and career development services at all four schools.
5. Representatives of ACPS Student Services, Monitoring and Evaluation, Pupil Services, IT, and Secondary Programs are developing a “dropout recovery” program to more consistently identify which students are no longer in our schools and not enrolled elsewhere. We are committed to finding every student and working with the family and community to successfully re-enroll any student who still lives in our community and is not attending school.
6. All students in grades 6-10 were screened to confirm their individual literacy levels and the recommendations for targeted interventions.
7. By late December the staff at each school will complete a review of the school records of each and every student in grades K-10. Those students who are struggling in mathematics will receive targeted interventions before, during and after school. Those interventions will be monitored through an electronic Student Success Plan currently being developed under the leadership of the Deputy Superintendent.
<http://www.acps.k12.va.us/board/strategic-plan/goals.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS -

1. Own the Outcomes! Every adult should assume responsibility for the success of each and every student. Those school staff and community agency staff tasked to work with children must create a strong team of support that does not let a child “fall between the cracks.”
2. Develop a sense of urgency around educating every child effectively.
3. Provide cultural competency training for all professionals who work with youth.
4. Increase mental health supports for students and their families.
5. Engage the entire family in support of students completing high school.
6. For each student who is re-enrolling in school, assign a team of at least four people to monitor the student’s progress: the administrator, the counselor, the social worker or psychologist and one representative from the appropriate community agency (Mental Health Services, Court Services, the Health Department, Job Link, Youth Services, etc.)
7. Where appropriate, involve the faith community and the business community in establishing sustainable one-to-one mentor programs for students who are re-enrolling.

8. Link each re-enrolling student to a school club, organization, athletic team or community service opportunity (address each student's need to belong).
9. Develop an academic progress monitoring system, led by the school counselor, to ensure that students who need extra help receive this help in a timely manner.
10. Increase apprenticeship and internship opportunities.
11. Support student efforts to recover credits more quickly through the use of online coursework, summer school, night school and dual enrollment at NVCC where appropriate.

3. ENHANCING FAMILY LITERACY

This committee validated current district efforts to promote literacy and reading among all students. There was consensus that literacy is a foundation for school readiness and success. Key to literacy and reading success is parental and adult involvement in the life of the child. The goal is to get parents reading and to read to their children. Educational failure is often intergenerational. Reading failure leads to academic failure and frustration with school. Breaking the cycle of intergenerational illiteracy is goal of this project.

PREVIOUS ACTION PLAN

GOAL: To inspire parents to read and read to their children

- Conduct assessment of literacy and reading levels of at-risk students (For example, what are the reading levels of youth, ages 12-21, who have been referred to the Intervention Prevention Education outreach program?)
- Identify and examine the illiteracy "hotspots" among the different schools and populations within the City of Alexandria
- Review current initiatives within Alexandria City Public Schools and other national efforts to promote reading among parents with school-age children
- Design a communications campaign to promote adult literacy and intergenerational reading in the families of the City of Alexandria

PROPOSED ACTION PLAN

Goal: To inspire parents to read and read to their children

- Establish locations in the City that will serve as focal points for the family literacy initiative. One of the eight strategic issues put forth in the recently released human services needs assessment was: *Improve the educational skills and preparation of parents, including the planning of their families, their awareness and utilization of resources, and their ability to serve as their child's "first teacher"*. One of the accompanying recommendations was *to strengthen existing or create new family resource centers in locations convenient to parents (libraries, schools, etc) residing in Alexandria's diverse communities*. The City currently has four Family Resource Centers that are managed by Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) and funded by Title I:

ARHA Center
Brent Place Center

910 Montgomery Street
375 Reynolds Street

Community Lodging Center
The Fields of Alexandria

607 Notabene Drive Apt. 1
4309 Duke Street

The centers are open from 2:00–6:00 pm, Monday through Friday. The Brent Place Center is closed during the summer and the ARHA Center has different programming during the summer months.

RECOMMENDATION - Pursue the feasibility of extending the hours of the family resource centers to accommodate evening, weekend and summer family literacy programming.

Motheread & Fatheread is a nationally acclaimed family literacy program sponsored by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities that promotes an appreciation for the power of sharing stories with one's family. Instructors (staff as well as volunteers) from local social service agencies; libraries, schools and educational programs; churches and community-based organizations participate in an intensive training institute called "Using Story as a Way to Teach" that provides instruction in how to implement the Motheread & Fatheread instructional model and curriculum. Teams of two instructors then lead and teach classes in the community for adults and children. With the guidance of instructors, a small group of parents reads a book aloud together and discusses the book's content and illustrations while relating the book to their own lives and families. The children then read and discuss books with their parents.

RECOMMENDATION - Recruit volunteers from the Alexandria Volunteer Bureau, Alexandria Community Trust, the Alexandria Education Partnership, and municipal agencies to staff a *Motheread & Fatheread* program at the Family Resource Centers.

Thinkfinity is the cornerstone of Verizon Foundation's literacy, education and technology initiatives. Marketed as a "comprehensive digital learning platform, Thinkfinity offers over 1,000 free online courses on a wide range of topics as well as 55,000 standards-based K-12 lesson plans, student materials, interactive tools and reference materials for students, parents and educators. Thinkfinity content partners produce nine discipline-specific, standards-based web sites that include lessons for teachers, activities to use in and out of the classroom, games for young children and teens, adult literacy resources, and reference materials for students, educators, parents, and after-school practitioners. The content partners and their Thinkfinity web sites include:

- John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts: ARTSEGE provides resources and examples for teachers to teach in, through and about the arts. Among the after-school programming offered is *Analyzing Photos*, where students examine works of art and learn tools to analyze and discuss photography.
- National Council on Economic Education: EconEdLink provides teachers and students with lessons and classroom learning activities based on economics topics in the news and real-time economics data.
- National Endowment for the Humanities: EDSITE features lesson plans and classroom resources about art and culture, literature and language arts, foreign language, history and social studies.

- National Geographic Society: Xpeditions offers materials for K-12 teachers and students and their families, including an interactive atlas with more than 1,600 printable maps.
- National Museum of American History: Smithsonian's History Explorer offers an after-school resource entitled *Be a Movie Director*, which prompts young people in grades 4-12 to explore the museum's collections to create movies using images from an online image database.
- International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English: among the resources available on ReadWriteThink is an after-school activity entitled *Design a Travel Brochure* -- young people learn writing skills, history and geography through travel. They then create travel brochures using pictures, photographs, maps, and details of what they learned.

Another partner website is Literacy Network, which was developed by the American Library Association, the National Center for Family Literacy and ProLiteracy Worldwide. The Literacy Network is a free, online tool that uses computers and other technology to deliver information and resources to anyone who wants to improve their own literacy skills or the reading and writing skills of someone else. It features top-notch literacy programs from across the country; tools for parents to help their children succeed in school; adult learner instruction that enhances literacy, problem-solving and critical thinking skills; and engaging activities that help students study and learn. It offers over 50 free courses in adult literacy, children's literacy, general literacy, technology and literacy, and literacy program administration. Available tools include: adult learner resources (recognizing the main idea and supporting details; sending notes and letters to your child's teacher); parent resources (talking about stories; helping your child build fluency); family literacy (planning a read aloud event for families; parent involvement; intergenerational financial literacy resources; family money matters); K-12 literacy; and Latino Families and Communities (which empowers families and communities to foster the literacy development of children).

RECOMMENDATION – Proactively market the *Thinkfinity Literacy Network*, to families in the City, particularly those in the neighborhoods of the Family Resource Centers (which are equipped with computers).

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ Lobby for a *Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop* at the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Home. *Free Minds* introduces young inmates to the transformative power of books and creative writing while instilling in them an appreciation for their potential.
- ❑ Identify families in the neighborhoods of the Family Resource Centers that include incarcerated parents and introduce them to the *Words Travel* program, which enables incarcerated parents to tape themselves reading books aloud and then send the tapes to their children.

- ❑ Advocate for the Alexandria Library to establish a *Families Reading Together*, which was developed by the Cumberland (MD) YMCA Family Support Center. The program helps parents better utilize the library and its services by increasing the number and scope of parent/child library visits. At the present time, the Alexandria Library's family literacy activities are primarily making space available for tutors from the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia and purchasing the books recommended for use by tutors (who work with one student at a time).
- ❑ Pursue with the Alexandria YMCA the possibility of a program like that sponsored by the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington Youth & Family Services (Silver Spring), which offers a weekly intergenerational component that brings parents and ESOL students together to read.
- ❑ Consider the feasibility of establishing a *Sowing the Seeds of Literacy* program, an initiative of Crossway Community, Inc. of Kensington, MD. The program uses gardening as a vehicle for promoting family literacy.
- ❑ Establish a partnership with the New Neighbors Education Center to aggressively market the services they provide. Located at 118 North Washington Street, the New Neighbors Education Center offers a complete family literacy program. Parents participate in ESL classes while their children participate in developmentally appropriate activities in childcare and, in an elective segment added in 2003, parents and children participate in English literacy and pre-literacy activities together. Teachers are volunteers who have young children and are members of a group called Partners in Parenting; all are college graduates, and several are certified elementary school or ESL teachers. The Children's Librarian of the local public library advises and conducts library visits for students. Two twelve-week, ninety-hour terms are offered each year with an enrollment of 150 adults and 70 children each term. Those who have taken advantage of the center represent over 70 different countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. A low fee of \$50 covers all classes in a term.
- ❑ Establish a partnership with the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia to market their *Family Learning Program* as well as their Learning Center at the Mark Center Club (5708 Merton Court, Alexandria).
- ❑ Consult with JobLink about the possibility of an initiative like that underway in Flanders Bay, Maine. *Families at Work* is a comprehensive family literacy program with a focus on employment. The program targets families with children under age 8 and undereducated adults who are seeking transition to work.
- ❑ Pursue with Carpenter's Shelter the feasibility of adding a family literacy component to its Child and Family Services program. The *Child in Transition/Homeless Family Literacy Project* of the Anchorage (Alaska) School District is establishing a culture of family literacy among homeless families. A Family Literacy Tutor/Specialist

provides weekly adult literacy instruction and intergenerational activities for families at a homeless shelter.

- ❑ Support the launching of *Family Literacy ALIVE!* ACPS has proposed a series of interactive workshops that broaden the literacy skills of parents and enhance their ability to advocate for their children in kindergarten through eighth grades. Workshops will focus on what parents are already doing at home; what happens in the classroom; what to do if their child is struggling; how to engage their children in authentic literacy activities at home; and how to monitor their child’s progress. The weekly workshop format will include time for participants to read, write, listen and discuss as well as time for parents and their children to work together on multiple uses of literacy and practice application of workshop strategies.
- ❑ Solicit applicants for a citywide literacy council comprised of parents, educators, businesses and community representatives that is being established by ACPS.

4. **BREAK DOWN SILOS BETWEEN AGENCIES AND SCHOOLS**

Service connection and coordination is critical in our efforts to reduce dropouts. The committee felt it was important to promote a coordinated and comprehensive effort in providing services to at-risk families and students. The committee felt it was important to move beyond the “silos” of service provision and examine community team strategies that link services and programs to families. Given case X, how do our agencies respond and how can these efforts be increasingly complementary of one another?

RECOMMENDATION – It was determined that this area of focus should be routed to the expertise of the City & Schools Staff Group for further discussion. The Gang Prevention Community Task Force requests a report from the CCSG.

Additional Matters –

- ❑ Support a focus on enhancement of math skills in addition to reading to help to make every student in grade 8 “algebra ready”.

CONCLUSION

The Subcommittee eagerly awaits your review of these recommendations –

Respectfully submitted, on behalf of the entire subcommittee,

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