

We Believe Partner Update

Some time has passed since our partner's group meeting and our last communication to you. That does not mean a lot has not been accomplished over the last few months or that the excitement for the Alliance has waned. This update will give you a glimpse of what has transpired and where the alliance will be focusing its efforts in the future.

What are we about? At our last meeting we spent time refining our mission and defining our values.

Our mission: We Believe is a not-for-profit alliance with a mission to unite the Bloomington community and its schools to help close the disparity and achievement gaps.

Who are we? We are an alliance of schools, government, businesses, community agencies, faith and civic organizations working together to integrate educational, social and economic reforms to create an environment in which the most effective teaching and student learning can occur.

How will we measure our success? We will establish goals that bring together community partners to:

- Prepare all students for school
- Ensure all students are reading by third grade
- Close or eliminate the economic disparity and achievement gaps

At our last meeting the school district committed to hiring a staff member to help coordinate our efforts. Members of the alliance screened candidates and held multiple interviews before recommending Suzanne Kpowulu to fill the position. Suzanne has a Masters in Social Work (MSW), has owned her own business, worked as a resource coordinator for the area's family collaborative, and has most recently been employed as the school district's out-of-school time programs manager. Suzanne started in her new role a couple of weeks ago and has been developing a work plan to initiate her first major project for the Alliance. We are excited to have Suzanne on board to coordinate the initiative for lasting change.

Suzanne has begun to identify 100-plus students – four-years-old to second grade – who are at risk of not reading at grade level by third grade. An assessment of these students' families will be conducted to ascertain their needs in the following areas:

- Basic needs: food, housing, clothing, medical, employment
- Educational support: in- and out-of-school help for school success
- Community connections: connecting families to the Bloomington community

Based on the assessed needs, a coordinated service plan will be created connecting identified families to the programs and services of the We Believe Alliance partners.

Other News and Accomplishments

- United Way awarded a grant to the MN Reading Corps to provide “members” to serve in schools providing one-on-one assistance to develop reading literacy skills. MN Reading Corps personnel will be assigned to the Pond Early Childhood Center and 6 elementary schools.
- We are about to launch a We Believe Alliance web site, which will include a link to all of our partners’ web sites or contact persons.
- Alliance partner Andries Coetzee of Oak Grove Presbyterian Church has teamed with the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department and our Kids Safari Program to provide a “summer gap” experience when city and school district programs are not available at the end of the summer before school starts.
- Talks continue between the school district and Fairview clinics to open a family clinic at the Pond Family Center. Target opening date is early fall.
- Suzanne is working with the United Way on a challenge grant that, if approved, would provide additional resources to the initiative to achieve its goals.
- Bloomington’s PTSA Council, led by Chip Groth, and our high school student government groups are conducting a district wide food drive to collect money and food for initiative partner VEAP.

We will continue to provide updates, and soon will have the web site activated for you to visit for continuing progress information. Thank you for your continued support of this unique initiative, and being a partner in the We Believe Alliance.