



engage in education.





get involved

with The Decatur Area Education Coalition

The extraordinary challenge of helping all children learn at high levels and become prepared for life-long success demands an increased role for business, educators, parents and others outside the school room.

The extraordinary reward of meeting this challenge is an improved quality of life for Decatur and Macon County residents and increased prosperity for all in the region.

What is needed is a fundamental way of working differently as a community to achieve community solutions to a high priority concern.



Decatur Area Education Coalition

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Strategy
- III. Vision
- IV. What a Community Can Do
- V. Implementation Plan
- VI. Governance
- VII. Finance Plan
- VIII. Sample Work Plans



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I. Introduction

“A major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process.

“No one individual, even a CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all the key obstacles, generate the short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of change projects and anchor new approaches in a community’s culture.

“A strong guiding coalition is always needed – one with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objective.”

– John P. Kotter, Leading Change,
Harvard Business School Press

Background

More than a quarter of the public school eighth graders in Macon County read below grade level. Math levels are just as low.

These numbers dramatically impact the workforce. Of adults 25 years or older in Macon County, 8% have less than a 9th grade education and only 76% are high school graduates. Nearly 40% of students entering Richland Community College require remediation in math and reading, and the state and local high school dropout rates are alarming no matter how they are calculated.

The economic future of a region is based on the educational achievement of the population in the schools and the workforce. The standard of living of each citizen is directly dependent on a community commitment to raise the education level of the community at large.



Process

A group of educators and community leaders started meeting in 2005 in Decatur to form an organized response to the issue of student performance.

Studies and assessment projects conducted by the Economic Development Corporation, the United Way, The Community Foundation of Decatur/Macon County, the Greater Decatur Chamber of Commerce, the Decatur Board of Education, and others began to focus all attention on improving academic achievement.

The complexity of the problem calls for a systemic, community-wide and sustained approach to achieve improvement. To facilitate this approach the group has organized a community support infrastructure called the Decatur Area Education Coalition.

This is a new project focused on achieving the highest educational goal for the betterment of our community – making Decatur and Macon County one of the most educated communities in Illinois.

The terms *initiative* and *project* may not do justice to what is envisioned. We are really talking about a fundamental way of working differently as a community to achieve community solutions to a high priority concern.



II. Strategy

The Education Coalition project is based on elements found in many strategic plans in Macon County. For example, the Decatur Public Schools Strategic Plan identifies these strategies: Raise expectations, impose rigor, and align resources, with information and research leading the way.

Each local plan seeks to improve academic achievement. What better rallying point could any community have for working in new and different ways to get a job done?

III. Vision

Coalition organizers want Decatur and Macon County to be recognized as one of the most educated communities in Illinois.

They outlined a series of visions that would make this aspiration a reality:

- Every child will be fully prepared for success when starting kindergarten.
- Every student will master grade level work.
- Every student will graduate from high school with skills and resources for obtaining a job or enrolling in college.



IV. What a community can do and why this will work

Influence on student achievement comes not only from excellent teachers and effective classrooms, but also from parents, home, and environment. Parent education levels and family and community resources have a great effect on students' ability to succeed.

According to national learning data, up to 75% of student learning impact is estimated to come from the following factors: mothers' education, income, preschool and its qualities, and home environment elements such as language stimulation, academic stimulation, learning materials, and variety of experience.

The Decatur Herald and Review editorial of August 19, 2007 emphasized the role of the community in the success of the Decatur Public School District's new strategic plan:

"The fact is that many people are responsible for student achievement. Students, parents, teachers, administrators and the community at large have a stake and should take an active interest. If any one component isn't actively engaged, student achievement can suffer.

"The beginning of every school year is filled with promise. In Decatur schools, a solid improvement plan and a school board and superintendent who are committed to making it work are additional reasons to be excited.

"But improvement in any school district is not a solitary exercise. It's crucial that educators, parents, students and the community work together."

Education Coalition organizers believe that sustainable and effective community outcomes can be achieved through identifying the community's highest aspirations for itself and supporting collaborative and systematic efforts to get the desired results.

This is not to say that collaboration promotes everyone working on exactly the same task or concept. Rather, collaboration encourages and ensures multiple approaches to every problem with multiple ideas on how to resolve it. Success comes from the synergy of sharing ideas and creating new initiatives focused on commonly understood outcomes.



V. Implementation Plan

- The Education Coalition will be a community support organization, recruiting a Coalition Steering Committee and a Community Roundtable. The Coalition Steering Committee will hire a coalition Project Manager.
- First steps will include solidifying engagement and reaction from an October 2007 Panel on Education and Our Future, and expand and confirm the community's aspiration and vision for education.
- Improvement Teams will be recruited to address the vision statements:
Every child is ready for kindergarten.
Every child masters grade level work.
Every student graduates from high school with necessary skills and resources for job or college.
- Representatives of existing community plans will be engaged in aligning resources and efforts toward achieving agreed-upon community outcomes.
- The Education Roundtable will serve as a network to bring insights and linkages from throughout the community, initiating public discussions on services, evaluation, data collection, and communications.
- The Steering Committee will develop a sustainable finance plan for the Coalition initiative.



VI. Timetable

October 10, 2007	Launch Education Coalition and Leaders Fund Challenge Fund.
November 2007	Engage civic sectors in collaboration through alignment of community plans; Launch Community Roundtable and Improvement Teams.
December 2007	Develop and coordinate through public discussions action plans among all sectors to achieve outcomes; Hire a project manager.
March 2008	Develop a 24 month plan to achieve sustainability.
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2nd year	Develop a review of the collaborative structure and process to date; Develop an outcomes review of first initiatives; Communicate the results of both reviews to all sectors and the community at large; Engage the community to confirm the work that has been accomplished and to aid in the development of 2nd stage initiatives; Secure on-going funding.
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3rd year and beyond	Expand community engagement; Monitor results; Be accountable to the community and funders.



Role of the Coalition Steering Committee

- Recruit members to the Roundtable and the Improvement Teams;
- Hire a project manager;
- Recommend an annual fund distribution budget;
- Review program design and requests for proposals to funding entities;
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive community plan to reach stated educational objectives;
- Report to the public annually on the progress toward each objective.

Role of the Community Roundtable

- Provide refinement of the vision and guiding principles of the Coalition;
- Provide input on work plans of the Improvement Teams, in order to assure that action items will achieve the agreed upon measurable objectives of each focus area;
- Provide linkages/networks to local groups, organizations, residents;
- Bring resources to support the Improvement Teams' work;
- Identify and assist with development of key partnerships.

Role of the Community

- Contribute toward the community's aspiration in every personal and organizational way possible;
- Evaluate the Education Coalition's efforts based on these and other criteria:
- Is the community a better place as a result of these efforts?
- Did we achieve the highest aspiration?
- Did we achieve measurable outcomes?
 - Increase in kindergarten readiness scores
 - Increase in grade mastery at all levels
 - Increase in number of high school graduates reaching college or jobs
- Was the community fully engaged in all aspects of the process?
- Did all sectors come together in a collaborative model to achieve solutions?
- Have we leveraged all our resources?
- Were resources aligned to create the most significant impact?
- Were the structures, processes and indicators changed?
- Did our governance structure succeed?



VII. Finance Plan

There is no central pool of funds dedicated to the improvement of education in Macon County. Educational institutions and programs receive funding from a myriad of sources.

The Coalition's activities will be based on systems devised by Improvement Teams to connect and enrich what is offered community-wide. The core funding to support these new developments will come from the Leaders Challenge Fund at The Community Foundation of Decatur/Macon County.

For information about the Leaders Fund Challenge contact The Community Foundation, 125 N. Water St., Suite 200, Decatur, IL 62523, (217) 429-3000, edco@endowdecatur.org.

VIII. Sample Education Coalition Work Plans

GOAL ONE: Every child in Macon County enters kindergarten ready to learn

Developed by Improvement Team One: Early Childhood Education Consortium

Measure: Kindergarten readiness scores move to above average for every entering class in every school in Macon County within a five-year performance period.

Strategy	Action Steps	Time Frame	Level of Investment	Degree of Difficulty
Expand learning through families	• Organize a hotline and information center on kindergarten readiness.	2008/ongoing	\$ \$	Ü Ü Ü
	• Identify low-readiness children entering kindergarten and develop services.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
	• Link resources with households and child care settings with focus on targeted low-readiness children.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
Improve education in childcare settings	• Enhance site based educational programming.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
	• Expand access to training for childcare workers.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Promote use by of such resources as the literacy van and readiness curriculum.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Create more licensed childcare providers.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
Support coordinated approach	• Maintain a database of low-readiness children, track interventions and academic progress.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü Ü
	• Identify gaps in resources and seek solutions.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Coordinate with childcare provider groups.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü
Develop community awareness of Kindergarten readiness	• Promote hotline and information center.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Participate in planned awareness campaigns.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Develop volunteer and organizational partners to get community acceptance of readiness standards.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü



Sample Education Coalition Work Plan

GOAL TWO: Every student masters grade level work.

To be developed by Improvement Team Two

Measure: Achievement test scores move from below average to above average in every grade in every school within the five year performance period.

Strategy	Action Steps	Time Frame	Level of Investment	Degree of Difficulty
Expand learning through youth programming	• Enhance site based educational programming.	2008/ongoing	\$ \$	Ü Ü
	• Link educational resources with youth program workers.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
Improve learning in childcare settings	• Expand access to educational resources childcare workers.	2007/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
	• Increase access to tutors to children in childcare settings.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
Support coordinated approach	• Maintain a database of low achieving children, track interventions and academic progress.	2008/ongoing	\$\$	Ü Ü Ü
	• Identify gaps in resources and seek solutions.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
	• Find effective tutoring for every student performing below grade level in home or after school programs, or through alternative instructional settings.	2008/ongoing	\$\$	Ü Ü Ü
Develop community awareness of educational standards and resources available	• Promote tutoring and homework help hotline and information center.	2008/ongoing	\$\$	Ü
	• Develop volunteer and organizational partners.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü



Sample Education Coalition Work Plan

GOAL THREE: Every youth has skills and resources upon high school graduation for obtaining a job or enrolling in college.

To be developed by Improvement Team Three

Measure: The graduation rate improves from 60% to 90% and every graduate has the necessary skills and resources to obtain college enrollment or to obtain employment in their chosen field within the five year performance period.

Strategy	Action Steps	Time Frame	Level of Investment	Degree of Difficulty
Expand access to college enrollment information and assistance	• Organize an assistance center for college enrollment providing assistance with applications, scholarships, financial aid, and skills preparation.	2008/ongoing	\$ \$	Ü Ü
	• Identify low-readiness students and target service toward them.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
	• Link resources with households of targeted low-readiness students.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
Expand access to jobs	• Organize a jobs assistance center for high school students.	2008/ongoing	\$\$	Ü Ü
	• Provide support from a system of workforce development programming for all area high school students.	2008/ongoing	\$\$	Ü Ü
	• Promote a coordinated approach to student exposure to employers while in junior high and high school.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü Ü
Support coordinated approach	• Maintain a database of students preparing to graduate, track interventions and academic progress.	2008/ongoing	\$\$	Ü Ü Ü
	• Identify gaps in resources and seek solutions.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Coordinate with provider groups.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
Develop community awareness of job and college readiness skills	• Promote job and college assistance centers.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Participate in planned awareness campaigns.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü
	• Develop volunteer and organizational partners.	2008/ongoing	\$	Ü