

Jackson's Promise

Overview Brief for Grad Nation Action Forum

September 2009

Collaborative Overview

Jackson's Promise is a cross-sector collaborative group committed to increasing the graduation rate for the Jackson Public Schools. The group is convened by the United Way of the Capital Area; it consists of 20 member organizations representing the education, public, business, nonprofit and faith communities. A steering committee helps to guide and direct the work. Steering committee members represent key sectors (business, education, nonprofit, health, city government) and serve as ambassadors for informing and engaging members of their specific sector in Jackson's Promise efforts.

Jackson's Promise intends to increase the graduation rate for Jackson Public Schools by targeting Provine and Wingfield High Schools, its two lowest-performing feeder patterns. Additionally, the group will work collaboratively with the local Promise Zone Coalition targeting a third feeder pattern, Lanier High School.

About Our Work

Jackson Public Schools has a district-wide Dropout Prevention Plan to provide goals, activities and services necessary to meet the three overarching goals of the state dropout prevention plan: (1) Increasing the state graduation rate to 85% by 2018-19; (2) Reducing the state dropout rate by 50% by 2012-13; and (3) Reducing the state truancy rate by 50% by 2012-13. Jackson's Promise will be working to support the district's plan through our collective assets, services and resources.

Jackson's Promise led the planning efforts for the Jackson Dropout Prevention Summit held on March 3, 2009. Entitled *Destination Graduation: Making Every Child A Success Story*, the leadership summit called together approximately 150 education, community, and business leaders, public officials, parents and young people. The summit provided a voice to all sectors and stakeholder groups and helped build a consensus for committing to long term strategies for reaching the overall goals of reducing the number of dropouts and increasing the JPS graduation rate. The summit also addressed many of the varying causes of dropout in Jackson, from broken homes to health coverage, from homeless and runaway youth to teen parents, and from juvenile justice issues to reclamation of prior dropouts. Jackson's Promise engaged in a series of post-summit meetings to determine a proper course of action based on the discussions, recommendations and findings of the leadership summit.

Based on statistics provided by the school district, and the expertise of the partners, the group decided to focus our efforts on the feeder patterns of the three high schools with the most needs: Wingfield High School, Provine High School, and Lanier High School. These schools are considered "Dropout Factories," high schools where no more than 60 percent of the students who start as freshmen make it to their senior year. An initial support Jackson's Promise is providing to the three high schools is service-learning grants that will engage students in helping to meet community needs and making the connection to their curriculum.

The next step for Jackson’s Promise is to create a map for each community that identifies where each of the Five Promises is located in each feeder pattern. Points on the map will be identified by parents, students, business leaders, government, and community stakeholders in order to inform the coalition and the community about where resources are available and what resources are not. The map will be used as a guide for creating easily accessible, collaborative community supports.

Key Initiatives and Programs

- **The Lanier Feeder Pattern StampOut DropOut Prevention Coalition** is coordinated by Operation Shoestring with the purpose of intentionally delivering the Five Promises to children and youth (and their families) with the twofold goal of dropout prevention and transformation of the quality of their life of service recipients—economically, socially, educationally, and spiritually. The Promise Zone Coalition will deliver a customized comprehensive array of wrap-around services and opportunities for 3,500 children and their families over a five-year period. Services and supports focus on the children and families in the Lanier High School feeder pattern. Provided wrap-around supports include mentoring and tutoring; creation of safe and healthy afterschool hubs in local neighborhoods; creation of community green spaces and gardens; parenting classes and supports; healthcare screenings and medical services; academic enrichment and literacy programs; and community service and service-learning opportunities. The Promise Zone Coalition and Jackson’s Promise share some common partners and work together to ensure cross-project information sharing and collaboration and coordination where appropriate.
- **StampOut DropOut** is a dropout prevention program targeting 50 children and their families at Galloway, Brown, and Rowan schools. The program provides enhanced academic and socialization support for children, and holistic support for their families. StampOut DropOut partners include United Way, Operation Shoestring, Girl Scouts, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Bethlehem Center and YMCA.
- **Community Resource Mapping** is a strategy in which the Five Promises in each target school’s surrounding community are identified and mapped. The map is intended to inform coalition partners, community stakeholders, and school personnel about the potential partners and resources located in the community, as well as provide insight into gaps and unmet needs.

Resources Needed to Bring Our Work to Scale

- Volunteers: School transition mentors; nurses, primary care physicians. (We are still developing our plan; once completed we will have an idea of exactly how many volunteers in each category we will need.) The roles of the school transition mentors will be to help individual students successfully transition from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school. The role of the healthcare providers will be to assess and provide basic healthcare and health information to students and to communicate with their parents.
- Informational Resources: Grant funding opportunities; communication guides that easily describe the scope and goals of America’s Promise Alliance’s work; community mapping software/resources; youth mobilization models/training resources

- Other Resources: Additional grant funding for implementation
- Staff: No needs at this time; program coordinator recently hired

Questions & Challenges for Consideration

1. What are some good resources around mobilizing youth to change their communities and advocate on their own behalf?
2. What are some of the best ways to engage the business community in community change efforts around education? What information is this segment most interested in and what are some of the better modes of delivery?
3. What are some good Community Resource Mapping resources?
4. What resources are available to assess and address parents' attitudes toward education?
5. Are there examples of Freshman Academies that allow students entering 9th grade to attend school apart from 10-12 grade students?

Appendix A: Jackson’s Promise Member List

Convener: Ira Murray, United Way of the Capital Area

Member Organizations

4-H Youth Development, Mississippi State University
American Academy of Pediatrics*
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Mississippi*
Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Mississippi*
Catholic Charities Jackson
City of Jackson*
GEAR UP Mississippi
Greater Jackson Chamber Partnership*
Jackson Metropolitan YMCA*
Jackson Public School District*
Mississippi Department of Education – Office of Dropout Prevention
Operation Shoestring*
State Farm
Student Leaders from Lanier, Provine, Wingfield High Schools
Urban League of Greater Jackson

**Representation on the Steering Committee*

Appendix B: Demographics & Statistics, Jackson Public School District

- Approximately 31,000 students attending 59 schools
- Ethnic distribution: 97.5% African American, 2% Caucasian, less than 1% Hispanic
- 85% of students receive free or reduced lunch rates
- 0.4% are English Language Learners
- Graduation rate: 69.8%¹

¹ Jackson Public School District website, www.jackson.k12.ms.us/