

## The Youngstown City Schools Seeks Partners ***Educating Children is Everyone's Responsibility***

By Krish Mohip, Jennifer Roller and Stephanie Shaw

People are watching the Youngstown City School District and a lot is riding on whether the schools - after years of disinvestment and apathy – can deliver quality education.

Our school improvement process is undertaken with an end in mind: The Youngstown Schools will become a model urban school district. The roadmap to excellence, however, must include the entire community.

Working together, we can become a school district that embraces innovative educational strategies that lead to improved academic results as well as long-term gains in school and school system capacity to meet the social and emotional needs of our students.

The 5,400 students who attend Youngstown Public Schools and their families represent our City's future and are entitled to a school district that is responsive to their needs.

The success of the Youngstown City Schools impacts the entire community. This means that all of Youngstown's citizens, including public and private sector employers, homeowners, elected officials, and our faith community, are also constituents and potential partners.

Educating our children is a shared responsibility that goes beyond just school personnel and parents. Building a strong Public School District takes a concerted effort across the community and requires all of our constituents to come together to focus resources on our shared vision of turning the Youngstown Schools into a model urban school district.

If we are successful, the result will have shared benefits for all of our constituents, including increased economic opportunity, enhanced property values, safer neighborhoods and a healthier more productive potential workforce.

The Eastern Ohio Education Partnership and The Raymond John Wean Foundation have accepted their roles as conveners and leaders in this effort and are committed to helping move the Youngstown Schools forward by supporting all of the district's constituents in engaging in this critical work.

This is a call to action for others.

We need everyone's support and partnership in meeting our goals for students in our district. The success of Youngstown City Schools is dependent on strong partners who can address the barriers that some students face including hunger, safety, quality medical care and access to educational resources outside the school day and year. Essentially, we must meet our students where they are in order to provide educational equity for them.

We must take stock of the resources that exist in our community and align them with the district's goals and resources and ensure equitable access for students and their families. The school district is committed to high achievement for all students regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, disability or giftedness.

The partnership between The Raymond John Wean Foundation, Eastern Ohio Education Partnership and the Youngstown City Schools is the Launchpad for some of the public-private initiatives that are outlined below.

The following are the types of initiatives that we hope to develop. Other initiatives can also form, depending upon people's expertise, interests and willingness to volunteer.

**Mentors** – Assigning a mentor from the Mahoning Valley to every student. These mentors would regularly check in with students and offer encouragement and advice. The mentorship program will need to be developed with appropriate training and screening for volunteers. The program will also need to be managed and evaluated.

**College and career advisers** – Starting in middle school, every student and his or her family would begin developing plans for life after high school. For some, this will be college and for others, it may be another post-secondary credential. The college and career program will need to be developed based on best practices in other communities. It will also need to be funded, managed and closely monitored.

**Community and service learning opportunities** – Learning about and engaging with the City of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley should be a key part of students' education. Creating community service learning opportunities

**Wrap-around services** – Offering a full-range of services, from medical to counseling, that students and their families could access free of barriers.

**Extracurricular** – Creating and implementing a full and interesting range of extracurricular activities for students, around such topics as chess, stock market, coding, politics and agriculture.

**Job shadowing** – Developing a robust job shadowing operation that starts as early as elementary school and continues through high school.

**Communications** – Developing a group of volunteers to work with each school on specific communications initiatives, aimed to enlist parental involvement and community support.

**Parent mentors** – Recruiting and training a group to work with parents in outreach initiatives where the mentors travel to the parents.

**Technology consultants** – Developing a group of experts who can work with teachers, students, administrators and parents about the wide range of technology issues that intersect with education.

With support from The Raymond John Wean Foundation, the Eastern Ohio Education Partnership and the Youngstown City Schools will co-convene initial meetings of interested parties. Please email Clate Banks at [clate.banks@youngstown.k12.oh.us](mailto:clate.banks@youngstown.k12.oh.us) with your desire to step off of the sidelines and become engaged in this very important work.

Jennifer Roller is president of the Raymond John Wean Foundation and looks forward to the day when its vision of empowered residents creating a healthy, vibrant, equitable and economically stable Mahoning Valley is realized.

Krish Mohip is the chief executive officer of the Youngstown Schools and is developing a plan for the district's recovery.

Stephanie Shaw is the executive director of the Eastern Ohio Education Partnership which is working to align education practices throughout the region. Her board includes representatives from a wide cross-section of business, industry, education and non-profits from the Mahoning Valley.