

August 19, 2009

## **Synopsis of A Gathering of Good (agog) Dinner & Discussion Setting Kids up for Success: What children need to succeed in school – and life**

Within the context of the 40 assets and “habits of the mind”, the dinner discussion centered around positive influences in the participants’ own childhood, where they learned their parenting skills and what assets/habits they see or would like to see in their own children. Guests also explored the challenges and benefits that modern technology places on parenting.

Childhood influences beyond parents included mentors, school volunteers, friends’ parents, boy scouts, and even a very personable and caring dental hygienist. Parenting skills were mostly learned from their own parents, friends who are parents and from early childhood groups.

Noted strengths of participant’s children included empathy, inquisitiveness, forthrightness, and honesty. When parents were asked what additional characteristics they want their kids to have before they leave home, these topped the list:

- self-knowledge
- a strong sense of values
- decision making skills
- sense of teamwork
- confidence
- think independently
- view situations from multiple perspectives

Teaching kids and effective problem solving skills (and teaching parents how to reinforce them) by analyzing the pros and cons, developing a means to an end, and anticipating and dealing with consequences was a characteristic parents would like to see further developed. The need for basic, strong values was mentioned as a necessary foundation for navigating all of life’s challenges, including those related to technology.

Throughout the evening, the modern realities of technology and the impact/challenges of it on youth and parenting was a theme that repeatedly arose. For instance, students and parents can now email teachers. Many parents remarked that this has a very positive impact on their children, especially if a child is shy or otherwise would not normally ask a question or seek assistance in person. They like the immediacy of knowing how their children are progressing as well. An example of a negative aspect of technology are the online outlets (my space, facebook) which are often used as another means to hurt/ostracize a child and where youth can engage in risky behaviors. Lack of access to cell phones or home computers among very low or low income families made apparent a digital divide, as these communication tools seem like prerequisites for functioning for most families.



MFS operates after school programs at elementary and middle schools high poverty neighborhoods. Students learn teamwork, math, art, music, performance/public speaking skills, community service and develop cultural understanding. MFS volunteers and staff also provide tutoring and mentoring in over 60 Portland area schools. Last year, more than 20,000 children received help through Metropolitan Family Service.

Measurable Results:

- Last year more than 7,000 children were enrolled in Metropolitan Family Service after school programs, which offer a wide variety of arts education opportunities.
- Students who regularly attend MFS after school programs scored higher on state tests than those who are not enrolled, and significantly increased their math and reading scores.
- Teachers reported that 77% of enrolled students had more positive attitudes; 76% improved their academic performance 73% participated more in class.

**Action steps to continue the conversation:**

- Talk to 6 other people about your **agog** dinner & discussion experience
- Volunteer at your neighborhood school
- Mentor a student or teach a child to read
- Host an **agog** dinner & discussion at your home
- Attend **A Gathering of Good on October 24, 2009**. Contributions support educational programs for children and families offered by Metropolitan Family Service.