



Metropolitan Family Service

1808 SE Belmont Street
Portland, OR 97214
503.232.0007
Fax: 503.232.9178

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Contact: Pat Kaczmarek,
Marketing & Communications Manager
Metropolitan Family Service
503.232.0007, ext. 170
patk@metfamily.org
www.metfamily.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Building a Strong Workforce - Aligning Business with Education

Portland, Oregon – July 1, 2011. Our community is changing as demographics impact our society. Metropolitan Family Service recognizes that it is important for community members to meet and discuss these changes and ways to shape our neighborhoods, schools and services.

Recently, a group of dynamic educators, community members and businesspeople met at the Happy Valley home of Cheryl Meyers to discuss the importance of aligning educational choices for students with the needs in our changing business environment. The discussion was part of a series of community events organized by Metropolitan Family Service to promote face-to-face discussion, civic engagement and social change.

The discussion was led by three topic experts including: Dr. Joanne Truesdell, President of Clackamas Community College, Dr. Tim Mills, Superintendent of Schools North Clackamas School District and business leader Lori Luchak, President, Miles Fiberglass & Composites.

As conversation leader, Dr. Truesdell shared a story emphasizing the enormous pressure some parents feel to send their kids to a four-year university. Recently, a high school senior applied to and was accepted to Montana State University. Coming from a low income family, the mother of this child said that she needed to take out loans and incur massive debt so her child could attend MSU. When asked why her daughter couldn't attend Clackamas Community College, located close to her home and much less expensive, the mother insisted that she attend a four year university. She was willing to go bankrupt so her daughter could attend MSU. Does this make sense?

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The participants identified a stigma against alternatives to the four-year college model, and recognized that society needs people trained to do very diverse kinds of work. It's important that we prepare young adults to step into the workforce or post-secondary training from high school through community college, trade schools and apprenticeships, as well as four-year colleges. Many manufacturing and technical occupations bring in a healthy salary that does not require a bachelor's degree.

To be successful, students must possess fundamental skills so they can make thoughtful choices. "Instead of an "either or" option for students, there could be an equally acceptable range of options for students upon graduation," said Dr. Truesdell. "Ask students, what path do you want to take? Does it lead to something helpful to society?"

Businesses are having many challenges finding employees with basic reading and math skills. As an employer, Lori Luchak talked about a potential employee who was unable to locate and use a tape measure. Disinvestment of the trades classes in high school, such as woodshop, mechanics, metalworking and auto shop have removed another way for kids – struggling or not - to connect with math.

North Clackamas School District has long provided technical training options for students, even in the face of budget challenges, in their Sabin-Schellenberg Professional Technical Center. Unfortunately, many districts are cutting back on options like the skills center, and federal funds to support such centers have been reduced.

Participants developed a list of basic skills that high school students need to meet employment criteria. They also came away with a better understanding of how to address educational challenges in their community.

Metropolitan Family Service developed the agog discussion series to raise community awareness on issues that affect everyone and to encourage personal action. To find out more please visit our website at www.mctfamily.org.

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Background information: About Metropolitan Family Service: For more than 60 years, Metropolitan Family Service has been building healthy communities to support children, families, and older adults. We provide services at 88 sites, including 55 schools. Metropolitan Family Service makes connections that strengthen the lives of 33,000 individuals and families each year.

For more information, contact Pat Kaczmarek, Marketing and Communications Manager, at 503.232.0007 ext.170. You can visit our website at www.metfamily.org.

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