

BY LUKE MAYBRY

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Too much recent news about public education is bad news; low teacher pay and high turnover, teachers buying their own supplies, and the possibility of controversial student reassignments, just to name a few.

It is more important than ever to share the good news in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, and in our community. What I've seen firsthand feels nothing short of revolutionary.



Maybry

Alignment Southwest Charlotte grew out of the Arrowwood Business Association, itself comprised of local manufacturers and business leaders, who approached area school principals, religious and non-profit leaders. The idea was to put all of our diverse community heads together for the single purpose of improving education for all of our children.

The need was obvious, as Steele Creek Elementary had test scores near the bottom of CMS. Judge Howard Manning accused Olympic High School and others of committing “educational genocide” as recently as 2005 due to low test scores.

The community responded beautifully. Area businesses donated supplies, technical expertise, and apprenticeships. Habitat for Humanity arranged for students from Olympic High School to build houses. Churches in the area adopted schools. My own congregation, Central Steele Creek Presbyterian

Church, adopted Steele Creek Elementary, providing reading buddies, baking cookies for teachers, filling backpacks with food for hungry kids, and proctoring EOGs.

In short, we have taken a proactive role in the school's work and the students' education. The results have been amazing. Test scores have risen at Olympic High School and its feeder schools, including Steele Creek Elementary.

STEMersion, a program to expose teachers to potential tech careers for their students, was born. LEGO robotics teams have sprouted.

Olympic is now known nationally and even internationally for its business collaboration and apprenticeship programs. Certainly, such results are from the students, parents, teachers and staff, but that such gains were achieved during Alignment Southwest Charlotte is no coincidence.

I encourage anyone interested to attend a meeting of Alignment Southwest Charlotte. You will see elementary, middle, and high school principals sitting with large area employers, like Siemens and Bosch Rexroth, alongside faith and community leaders like myself, in bold collaboration. As we continue to have these meetings, and do this work together, we are alarmed to realize that similar business-faith-school community collaborations are really not occurring elsewhere in our community.

Sure, one company, or one church, may support one school, but the real magic is when everyone is in the room together. The benefits and advantages of such collaboration are too many to list.

A central thrust of Alignment Southwest Charlotte is that public education is everyone's business. We cannot succeed as a society, and public education cannot succeed, when we pay our taxes and expect someone else to solve the problems. Our collective capacity to do good is simply unimaginable.

Please check out Alignment Southwest Charlotte, and start your own version somewhere in Mecklenburg County.

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