

Education In the Valley

Forum

All Aboard Westcliffe, January 18, 2024

Sponsored by the **Education Legacy Fund**

and

West Custer County Library

At a Glance.....

The purpose of the forum was to explore options, opportunities, obstacles, and solutions to improve education for all in the valley.

Over 80 people representing a wide variety of interests, including our public school, home schooling and religious schools participated in the event. The process consisted of five “Topic Tables” each manned by two moderators gathering input from participants rotating through each table session during the event.

Key takeaways:

- 1) There needs to be much better communication between the diverse groups engaged in education in the valley. A community wide platform such as “Education in the Valley” posted on social media, the press, and KLZR and Library

including the Valley Strong Agenda could be a useful tool for a complete listing, dates, and details of all options for education whether K-12, continued education, or lifelong learning, to provide access to all educational resources available.

- 2) There is an urgent need to tap into the significant pool of capable and willing community members and parents to step up as teacher's aides, mentors, coaches, and supporters of all community members interested in furthering their education. Reactivation of the "Adopt a Class" program and expanding it beyond the school would be an excellent start. Many of the ideas presented during the forum cannot be realized by existing entities (funding, staffing...) necessitating significant volunteer/charitable efforts.
- 3) Many excellent ideas for extra-curriculum activities were proposed (see detailed report below) involving the Library, Arts and Theatre, Dark Skies, VA, local businesses, trades, government etc. The most obvious obstacles for such activities are transportation and a platform to activate, enact and monitor.

The Details

Following is a detailed report listing each table topic, the moderators, and the extensive listing of the input gathered, edited for duplication and brevity. As always, comments, further ideas etc., are welcome. Please visit the ELF (elfcc.org) and Library (westcusterlibrary.org) websites for contact and further information.

Early Childhood

Moderators: Stacy Terrill and Laurie Yarger

- What already exists for Families: MOPS, Library Playgroup (Wednesdays), Informal playgroups, Wild & Free (Homeschool groups-Tues from 11-1), Swim Program (infant-age 10), Gymnastics Program (ages 3-6), Dolly Parton Imagination Library
- What Community would like to see as mentioned at Forum: Parents as Teachers (Existing State Level Program), HeadStart/Early HeadStart, Home Childcare Providers (more), Music Programs, “Blue Zones”, Mentoring programs for families and individuals, Picnics (community wide and/or age specific), Field Trips, Early Childhood Health & Well-Being (more available at local Health Clinic), Shared Community Co-Ops, More Concurrent Enrollment opportunities at School, Collaboration with the Lighthouse
- Ideas for all Groups: More and consistent Marketing/Dissemination of information via Valley Strong Calendar or similar, Facebook/Social Media, Radio Station, Bulletin Boards at Parks,

Physical Signs, Utilize already established Community Events (ex: Valley Strong Dinner) (Education in the Valley platform)

- Other Ideas: Connections with young and old in our Community, helping families/others who feel secluded connect with mentor/volunteers on needs, ex: Families with Special Needs support
- Overall: Education needed at Community Level (even if you do not personally have children/grandchildren in the area) on the importance of supporting Early Childhood in our Community and those families, so that we have a thriving Custer County Community.... Building the Connections between “young and old”. Allowing “volunteers” to share their knowledge/support with others.

Continued Education/Lifelong learning

Moderators: Troy Bomgardner, Hawley Young

Adult Learning: vehicles/venues to facilitate adult learning sessions.
Identify topics/areas of need and interest

1. Welcome to the Valley class
2. Learning club led by expert locals/retirees
3. Financial literacy courses
4. Engaging VA
5. Re-careering support
6. Foreign languages
7. Adult literacy?
8. Evening classes for working adults

Continued Education (youth..)

1. Apprenticeships – skills – mentoring – internships
2. GED assistance
3. EMS courses
4. College prep support
5. Life skills
6. Business 101 – entrepreneurship - financial literacy
7. Additional IT/computer training – coding
8. Internships at local businesses/organizations

Other Ideas/Thoughts

1. G.R.E.A.T courses
2. Teacher skill enhancement training,
3. cDOT classes/basic automotive classes
4. Medical careers Nursing, CNA, Elder care etc
5. Education section in local newspapers and on Social Media ?

Arts and Humanities

Moderators: Linnea Gillespie, Chris Relph

Communication on what is available to those who might be interested.

- There are already lots of Arts & Humanities activities happening in the Wet Mountain Valley.
- The issue is that many potential participants do not know what the activities are.
- The providers do not know the most effective ways to get the word out.

Need more collaboration

There are only so many adult volunteers in the valley to run educational programs. How do the various organizations and parents collaborate to maximize resources? Examples...

- KLZR with the school
- The theater and the school
- 4H - alternate parents running activities as groups instead of doing it individually
- Rebecca's Fund for Children's Art and Sangres Art Guild already collaborate with the public school but are reaching only a fraction of homeschooled children. Could easily become more than current volunteers can handle.

Music for children and Dance for adults

- There are music festivals and events for adults. What music activities are available for children, especially in the summer?
- There is a dance studio in town for children. Several adults were interested in various types of dance.

Questions

- Who teaches music lessons in the area?
- Are there philosophy classes at the public school?

- What music activities are available for children, especially in the summer
- Expanding access to the public school library
- Bring back the Librarian!!!
- Form a debate club to teach public speaking.
- Create a safe environment to be creative
- Have classes on conflict resolution
- More dance – line, square, ballroom – many adults were interested in this for themselves
- More collaborative after school activities
 - 4H used to be very collaborative where parents would alternate to head an activity.
 - There is a shortage of adult volunteers so need to be collaborative to use available resources
 - Increase the relationship between KLZR and the school
 - Broadcast the school sporting events

Commerce / Trades / Hands-On Learning

Moderators: Steve Lasswell, Mark Maloney and Clayton Wise

Key Takeaway: Students need to be aware that there are lots of trades/careers that don't require a college degree where they can earn a good living doing something they like.

- Expose students/graduates to the different trades and what they entail (internships).
 - Many trades in the Wet Mountain Valley need additional workers.

- Students can determine whether they are passionate about a particular trade.
 - Generate opportunities for students to “shadow” trades experts.
 - Identify/create apprenticeship programs.
 - This can include training in how to start a successful business (basic “how to” accounting/administration).
 - Institute a work-study program at the school.
 - Interface with the Fremont CDOT/Pueblo Community College Trades Program.
 - Reinstitute the “volunteer coordinator” position at the school.
 - Hire a wood shop/tech teacher for the vacant position at the school.
- Create basic classes in different trades, including how technology plays a role in each.

Questions

- What local tradesmen would be interested in participating?
- Are there any apprenticeship programs in the Valley?
- Where can we get funding to support these programs?
- Would Pueblo Community College support this?

Concerns/Obstacles

- Finding and coordinating volunteers
- Identifying/generating funding
- Fitting these ideas into the school curriculum
- Including graduates who are no longer in the school.

Science and Technology

Moderators: Alma Golden and James Gilbert

Areas of interest:

- Aeronautics
 1. Local airport/pilots/plane owners
 2. Space museum in Colorado Springs?
 3. Military (Fort Carson, Air Force base, AF Academy)
 4. Visiting professionals at the school
- Agricultural
 1. FFA, 4H
 2. Mentoring by local ranchers
 3. Sustainable ranching/farming/food production
 4. Field trips to famers/ranchers
 5. Natural Western Center?
- Technology
 1. School innovation challenge – prizes
 2. Robotics
 3. Advanced computer training – coding etc.
 4. Using Fridays as extra curriculum days
 5. Amateur radio
 6. 3D printing
- Health Sciences
 1. EMS training
 2. Utilizing the local clinic and Salida Hospital connection
 3. Volunteering at the clinic/ambulance
 4. Internships at clinic or Salida Heart of Rockies
 5. Optional health – diet – cooking classes
 6. Field trips to large hospital
 7. Training for elder care
- Natural Sciences
 1. Geology (Jay Temple?)
 2. Dark skies

3. Environmental sciences
 4. Nature club?
 5. Trails for All involvement?
- General Observations
 1. Career Exposure/Mentoring
 2. Challenges with disabled/impaired students
 3. Step up collaboration with CSU Pueblo and CC Pueblo
 4. Amateur Radio?
 5. Hobby Shop or Tinker Mill or Makerspace options
 6. More field trips....

Conclusion

This event highlighted the possibility of positive collaboration right here in Custer County when the issue is of equal concern for all. Thanks to all who made it happen, and special thanks for all who attended and so actively participated! Please visit the Education Legacy Fund website: elfcc.org and the Library: westcusterlibrary.org for updates, more information, and how to donate if you feel you'd like to support our initiatives. Reminder: the Education Legacy Fund (ELF) is a 501c3 endowment funded entirely by generous donors like you.