

6 EDUCATION

“The great aim of education is not knowledge but action.”

~Herbert Spencer

During the course of its meetings, the Education Subcommittee sought to use education as a means to advance equity by creating opportunities to support youth and families. To know is to be empowered and empowerment fuels change.

The Education Subcommittee brought together educators of all sorts--authors, executive directors, school administrators, teachers. These individuals let their years of personal and professional experience as students, then as teachers of children, adults, and families in this community be their North Star.

While discussing the pressing issues facing education in the Tuscaloosa community, common themes began to develop: mental health and development, social support for families, and academic support for children. These themes became the basis of the actionable recommendations provided by the Education Subcommittee.

The Education Subcommittee hopes that the recommendations found hereafter will improve the lives of Tuscaloosa's children and family for years, and even generations, to come.

Establish a City of Tuscaloosa Department of Youth Advancement and Opportunity

Implementation Time-frame:	Intermediate
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education, Youth Sports and Recreation, and Community Connection and Outreach
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Tuscaloosa City Schools, youth-centered non profits, University of Alabama, Stillman College, Shelton State Community College, Juvenile Detention Center, United Way of West Alabama, Family Counseling Services

The Education subcommittee in conjunction with the Youth Sports and Recreation Subcommittee recommends the establishment of a City of Tuscaloosa Department of Youth Advancement and Opportunity.

The full recommendation can be found in the Youth Sports and Recreation sub-section of the Recommendations.



Establish a mentorship program that would pair all identified Tuscaloosa City Schools students with a mentor

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Tuscaloosa City Schools, youth-centered non-profits such as Big Brothers Big Sisters Tuscaloosa's ONE Place, Boys and Girls Club, University of Alabama, Stillman College, Shelton State Community College, Juvenile Detention Center, United Way of West Alabama, Family Counseling Services

Mentoring is a powerful tool that can positively affect the lives of underserved children and youth. According to mentoring.org, studies have consistently demonstrated that children and youth with mentors are 55% less likely than their peers to skip a day of school, 78% more likely to volunteer regularly, 90% are interested in becoming a mentor, and 130% more likely to hold leadership positions. The EDU subcommittee believes that creating a mentoring program for all Tuscaloosa City School students could have a multiplier effect on positive outcomes for our children and youth.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

The EDU subcommittee recommends the creation of a city-wide, longitudinal mentorship program for Tuscaloosa City schools students. At a minimum, the mentorship program will incorporate the following components:

- 1. Mentors will be expected to maintain a relationship with the child from kindergarten through high school graduation**
- 2. Prioritization of children and youth with an incarcerated parent/guardian, in foster care, experiencing absenteeism, teen pregnancy, homelessness, and other behavioral or environmental concerns**
- 3. Potential Matches could be made with the assistance of Tuscaloosa City School administrators, guidance/school counselors, church officials, existing youth service organizations, etc.**

Create gun safety programs to familiarize K-12 students with the dangers of firearms

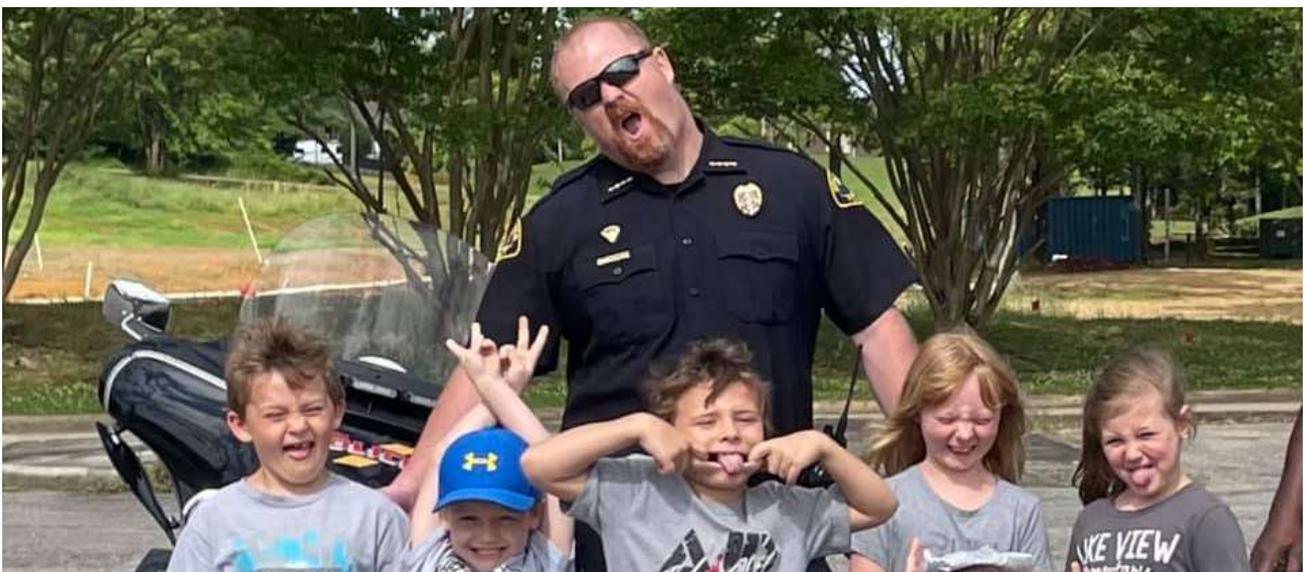
Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education, Community Connection and Outreach
Lead Organization:	Tuscaloosa Police Department
Potential Partnerships:	Department of Youth Advancement and Opportunity, Tuscaloosa City Schools, DCH Regional Medical Facility

The increase in gun violence across the nation and in Tuscaloosa is a cause for concern. In an attempt to prevent intentional and/or accidental injury or death, the Education subcommittee recommends the creation and implementation of a developmentally appropriate gun-safety program.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

The EDU subcommittee endorses the following criteria in the adoption and/or design of a gun safety program for Tuscaloosa's youth:

- 1. Curriculum must adaptable to K-12, be developmentally appropriate, and based on empirically well-performing education programs**
- 2. Free firearm safety kits should be made available to all participants**
- 3. Prioritization of non-violent response and de-escalation tactics included in the curriculum**



Hire enough full-time social workers to employ one at each school within the Tuscaloosa City school system

Implementation Time-frame:	Intermediate
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Department of Human Resources, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa City Schools

School social workers play an integral part in the operation of any school. Social workers are liaisons between the student, the home, and the community. As they help guide student's academic success, they simultaneously balance supporting administration and provide numerous mental health, behavioral, and crisis interventions for students and their families. The emergence of COVID-19 in the spring of 2020, highlighted the critical role social workers play in fostering healthy environments for students in--and out of school. During the course of the Education subcommittee meetings, the membership became aware that some schools share social workers. Due to COVID-19, the mental health concerns of youth and their families have been exacerbated by the persistence of the virus within our communities. Now, more than ever, we need social workers.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

The Education Subcommittee recommends increasing the employment of social workers within Tuscaloosa City Schools to ensure that each school has at least one full-time, dedicated, on-campus social worker.

- 1. Social workers should only be assigned to one school for the duration of a full academic year**
- 2. The social workers from each school should meet regularly to share ideas, common concerns, and solutions**

Revive and revamp the Tuscaloosa City Schools STARS Academy, TAPS and HELP Programs and collaborate with PRIDE of Tuscaloosa

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Tuscaloosa City Schools

Educators and members of the Education subcommittee have reported positive results from some of the now-defunct programs listed. A frank discussion will be necessary to learn why some of these programs stalled and address the barriers, if any, to revive them. The Education subcommittee prefers to not reinvent the wheel, but rather to utilize program structures already in place when possible.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

The EDU subcommittee recommends reinstating these programs to assist our children and youth facing behavioral and emotional barriers to participation at their home school. As such, EDU seeks:

1. Conversation with Tuscaloosa City School Superintendent and Staff

The EDU subcommittee endorses a candid conversation with Tuscaloosa City School Board and Staff to discuss the aforementioned programs.

- a. Understanding the barriers that students face without these programs
- b. Understanding the rationale that eliminated the programs
- c. Active collaboration with the Tuscaloosa City Schools on viable, programmatic partnerships to benefit the children and youth affected by the closure of these programs
- d. Exploration of alternative programming and their comparative advantages and opportunities

2. Identify opportunities for collaboration with PRIDE of Tuscaloosa

The EDU subcommittee recommends engaging with PRIDE of Tuscaloosa to identify programs, projects, or events that are aligned with the mission of Project Unity for collaboration

Develop a checklist or offer refresher training to help teachers and school staff identify students who have experienced adverse childhood experiences

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Family Counseling Service, Tuscaloosa City Schools- Social Work Services, Indian Rivers Behavioral Health

Children who experience or witness violence in the home or community, unstable family dynamics, food insecurity, etc. are more likely to develop mental health, substance abuse issues, or engage in criminal behavior. Identifying and seeking support for these children early is crucial to their future well-being.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

The EDU subcommittee endorses the creation of educational aids for teachers and school staff in relation to the identification and support of student survivors of adverse experiences. The recommended education aids include:

- 1. Pocket cards and magnets**
 - a. These items will be a handy on-the-go reference for teachers and staff.
- 2. Quarterly refresher training**
 - a. In-person and virtual options

Identify therapeutic options for children and family members who have witnessed or experienced traumatic or violent events

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Family Counseling Service, Tuscaloosa City Schools- Social Work Services, Indian Rivers Behavioral Health, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa Police Department, Tuscaloosa Fire, and Rescue, Community Unity, 100 Black Men, Nation Pan-Hellenic Council Fraternities, DCH Regional Medical Center

Tuscaloosa's disturbing increase in violent crime, especially gun violence among young Black men, there is a slew of silent victims--children and their families. Oftentimes, children and families experience anger, denial, depression, anxiety, and as a result, begin to engage in harmful and/or retaliatory behaviors. In the most unfortunate situation, the cycle of violence continues. To end the cycle and reclaim the lives of our children, friends, and neighbors, the Education Subcommittee recommends the establishment and implementation of trauma-informed therapy and restorative justice programs for victims and perpetrators of violent crimes, their children, and family members.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

The EDU subcommittee endorses the establishment and implementation of trauma-informed therapy and restorative justice programs for victims and perpetrators of violent crimes, their children, and family members. The subcommittee recommends that the program includes the following components:

- 1. Free and/or low cost therapeutic care**
- 2. Use of trauma informed methodologies and best practices with all parties**
- 3. Hospital Intervention**
 - a. Respond to gunshot and violence-related trauma situations
 - b. Work with survivors of violence during their stay
 - c. Intervene in conflicts and aim to prevent further violence
 - d. Work with emergency department staff
 - e. Reach out to community members at risk of being involved in future violence
 - f. Work with family members of survivors of violence to promote hope and healing
 - g. Connect individuals impacted by violence with community resources

2. Crime Scene/Court Intervention

- a.** Perform similar responsibilities as with Hospital Intervention
- b.** Respond to gunshot and violence-related trauma situations

3. Youth Intervention

In addition to the responsibilities in Hospital and Crime Scene/Court Interventions, Youth interventions will include:

- a.** Consent from parent and/or guardian
- b.** Use developmentally appropriate techniques
- c.** Work with facility and staff of the home school
- d.** Work with volunteers, mentors, role models if involved in extracurricular activities

4. Prioritization of the identification and training of Black men and women as peer support/ community network for victims and their families

5. Inclusion of children and family members experiencing other traumatic events such as incarcerated immediate family members, sudden loss of a loved one, homelessness due to natural disaster or fire

Conduct a review and assessment of academic and career tech opportunities available for residents of the Tuscaloosa County Juvenile Detention Center and develop a re-entry program to minimize academic and social regression

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Juvenile Detention Center, the Dannon Project, Tuscaloosa City Schools, Department of Justice

Incarcerated teens should receive the best possible educational opportunities and be in a position to re-enter school at the same grade level once released. The Education Subcommittee supports institutional focus on rehabilitation and growth rather than punishment. Consider modeling after or forming a chapter of The Dannon Project.



Key Elements of the Recommendation

1. Conversation with Director of Juvenile Detention Center and Staff
2. Joint identification of barriers to re-entry of incarcerated teens and the subsequent development of workable solutions

Reinvest in the Gateway to transform the facility into a venue for children to experiment with technology-related interests

Implementation Time-frame:	Intermediate
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education, Youth Sports and Recreation
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Gateway

The Education subcommittee in conjunction with the Youth Sports and Recreation Subcommittee recommends reinvestment in the Gateway to transform the facility into a venue for children to experiment with technology-related interests



The full recommendation can be found in the Youth Sports and Recreation sub-section of the Recommendations.

Hold discussions with Tuscaloosa City Schools officials to determine feasibility of keeping school facilities open past traditional school hours

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	Tuscaloosa City Schools
Potential Partnerships:	Various non-profits throughout Tuscaloosa

Schools are generally within walking distance of most neighborhoods where lack of transportation may be a hindrance to participation in after-school and weekend programs that could make use of this space, such as LIFT Alabama, The Bridge, and Five Horizons. The Education Subcommittee would like to support more weekday programs held during the evening hours between dinner and bedtime.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

1. Collaborative support for existing after-school programs and weekend programs.

Establish partnerships with various youth services agencies, health care providers, juvenile court staff, DHR, and other agencies to identify at-risk children prior to pre-Kindergarten for placement in mentorship, early intervention, and DYAO programs

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Community Service Programs of West Alabama, Alabama Department of Human Resources, Pediatricians

Key Elements of the Recommendation

1. Invest in early intervention programs to serve a greater number of children

Host workshops for conflict management and resolution training for youth and families

Implementation Time-frame:	Short-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Tuscaloosa City Schools, Tuscaloosa's ONE Place, mediators and facilitators

Conflict resolution is a skill that must be strengthened and developed. With increases in violence across our country and community, it could be considered an essential life skill. The Education Subcommittee recommends incorporating dedicated lesson plans into the Tuscaloosa City School curriculum beginning in Pre-K and continuing through graduation. In addition, the Education Subcommittee endorses the inclusion of parents/guardians in an annual conflict resolution workshop as a part of the Student/Parent Acknowledgement.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

- 1. Identification and selection of content provider**
- 2. Requirement of conflict resolution course completion for access to some social services such as rental and utility assistance, District Attorney's Office's Second Chance program, Municipal Court fee waiver opportunities, etc.**

Invest funding into city wide broadband installation

Implementation Time-frame:	Long-Term
Project UNITY Subcommittee(s):	Education, Economic and Workforce Development
Lead Organization:	City of Tuscaloosa
Potential Partnerships:	Local cable and internet providers, City of Tuscaloosa-Information Technology Department

In the event of another natural disaster or unforeseen event, our community must ensure that our youth, families, schools, and service providers maintain uninterrupted access to its digital learning, case files, etc. To this end, the Education Subcommittee recommends the investment of funding into city-wide broadband installation.

Key Elements of the Recommendation

- 1. Define underserved communities/areas within Tuscaloosa**
- 2. Identification of underserved communities/areas within Tuscaloosa**
- 3. Create Scope of Work for installation of city-wide WIFI with special emphasis on the previously identified underserved areas**