

OUR REQUEST: To ask the County Commissioners to work closely with the Buncombe County School Board and the Asheville City Council to provide a public bus route at least 5 days a week, 8 hours a day from River Ridge Shopping Center to the Reynolds campus, a distance of 1.9 miles.

Purpose:

Explanation of the need for a public bus route from the current nearest bus stop at River Ridge Shopping Center down HWY 74A to the Reynolds School campus: a distance of 1.9 miles **in order to improve graduation rates in the Reynolds School District**. Our 10 minute presentation will include a piktochart.

Presenters:

Representatives of the Family to Family (F2F) program in the Reynolds school district:

- **Cindy Oak, Tina Stovall, and Tammy Young**, Leslie Anderson (in absentia due to surgery).

F2F is a volunteer program begun in 2009 to support impoverished youth and families in the Reynolds district by connecting families of faith to cover identified student needs that cannot be met by existing agencies. At the request of school officials at Reynolds Middle and High Schools, F2F undertook a study of transportation needs of students and the impact on school engagement and success.

- Ten Reynolds High School students who personally experience the loss of opportunities due to lack of public transportation from their homes to their middle and high schools

Impact statement:

-Lack of transportation is a barrier that impacts the graduation rates of a community. This is one of few barriers that can be addressed directly and solved in order to level the playing field for our impoverished students and families.

-Graduation Initiative studies show that impoverished students who do not have access to extracurricular school activities often do not complete high school successfully. Students who cannot access opportunities and requirements such as tutoring, recovery credit courses, dual enrollment classes, attendance make-up sessions as well as extracurricular activities such as sports practices and events, fine arts rehearsals and productions, and school social activities due to no transportation, other than the regular school bus, do not engage in the life of their schools and feel they do not "belong".

-Furthermore, families who cannot access their children's schools due to lack of transportation also do not participate in their child's academic life by not attending teacher conferences, not participating in school events, not volunteering, nor even picking their child up from school when they are sick. Thus, they do not encourage school engagement which also has been shown to decrease rates of graduation.

Impoverished students and families become invisible.

Additional Findings Through this Project:

- Statistics show that 60% of Middle School and over 40% of High School students receive free and reduced lunch rates indicating a high number of families living in poverty within the Reynolds district. Because High School students are reluctant to report, the 40% underestimates the need.

- It is also significant to note that over 90% of the Reynolds Middle School families and over 60% of the High School families live within the city limits, pay city taxes, and utilize the city bus for many reasons.

- Our survey shows that 53% of our students/parents and 74% of community residents would ride the public bus if available.

- In gathering anecdotal information, we learned that fewer high school students are obtaining their NC drivers' licenses due to economic restraints.

Timeline and methodology of research:

October 2013 - Initial meeting with Reynolds Middle and High School administrators/ counselors/ social workers who identified the top barrier impacting their impoverished students as the lack of public transportation to their campuses.

November 2013 - Initial meeting with Julie Mayfield, Chair, Asheville Multimodal Transportation Commission and Chris Pelly, Asheville City Council

October 2014 – Initial meeting with Dr. Tony Baldwin, superintendent of Buncombe County Schools, and administrators from Reynolds Middle and High Schools

November/December 2014 - Public Bus Transportation electronic and paper survey conducted with students and parents from the Middle and High Schools. Over 900 responses were received.

May 2015 – Received final student and parent survey report compiled by AP Statistics class, Reynolds High School

July 2015 – Follow-up meeting with Dr. Tony Baldwin, school administrators, and Buncombe County Graduation Initiative Coordinator, Kaye Lamb. Request to Ms. Lamb for research on the connection between lack of school participation and graduation rates.

August 2015 – Community residents (apartment complexes) and Businesses close to the Reynolds campus surveyed and anecdotal information gathered.

January 2016 -Meeting with Kaye Lamb, Graduation Initiative Coordinator, to hear her findings and share research and anecdotal information.

January 2016 - Meeting with Julie Mayfield, Asheville City Council, and Cindy McMahan, Buncombe County School Board member and Reynolds District resident

February 2016 - Meeting with Ann Franklin, Chair of Buncombe County School Board and Cindy McMahan, School Board representative

February 2016 - Meeting with Yuri Koslen, Transit Projects Coordinator, City of Asheville

April 2016 - Meeting with Ellen Frost, Buncombe County Commissioner

****The outcome of each meeting was encouragement to pursue our quest for a public bus down Hwy 74A in order to remove the transportation barrier for impoverished students and their families in our Reynolds district.***