Chattanooga 2.0

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This learning experience was co-sponsored by *Chattanooga 2.0*
and the McKee Chair of Excellence in Learning,
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Introduction

This McKee Learning Lunch addressed *Chattanooga 2.0*, a current initiative of the Chattanooga community with the intent of "Building the Smartest Community in the South." At the session, a representative group of Chattanooga citizens discussed the initiative and its goals.

In accordance with the process used at every McKee Learning Lunch, there were three general feedback opportunities, or Assignments 1, 2, and 3. The participants, who are listed at the end of this report, provided their insights and questions about the topic. These responses and insights are presented below.

Assignment 1

Pre-discussion Question: Prior to the presentation and discussion, what question(s) do you have about this topic? The responses follow.

Active Involvement and Community Desire

- Do we have the community that will to make the tough decisions needed to ensure that we take advantage of this tremendous opportunity?
- Will the community have the will to address the issues raised by the *2.0* report, and will addressing those issues make a difference for our whole community?
- How can teachers, students, parents, and administrators become a part of *Chattanooga 2.0*'s goals to develop solutions to Hamilton County's "broken" public schools, specifically in Chattanooga's lower-income areas?
- Will there be an opportunity for student involvement in making decisions?
- How soon can we get some movement on a plan?
- What will happen if we don't do something?

Chattanooga 2.0 Initiative Specifics

- Is the *Chattanooga 2.0* team being structured to effectively and efficiently reach the aggressive goals of the initiative?
- What is being done by *Chattanooga 2.0* to reach more people to get better involvement?
- How is *Chattanooga 2.0* different from previous efforts aimed at improving public education in Hamilton County?
- Does *Chattanooga 2.0* plan to address the additional burden to teachers of high-stakes testing and over-testing?
- What connections/network does *Chattanooga 2.0* have within the inner-city community?

Chattanooga 2.0 Community Opportunities

- How does this initiative build relationships among local parents as well as among teachers and between groups of parents and teachers?
- How will *Chattanooga 2.0* actively change education from what it is now?
- How can *Chattanooga 2.0* make Hamilton County schools more heterogeneous and less segregated?
- How will *Chattanooga 2.0* help us to address whatever is hindering the expansion of success into underperforming areas?

Curriculum Focus

- What will happen if subject-matter instruction in K–5 is not improved?
- Will *Chattanooga 2.0* carefully examine the K–5 curriculum in order to determine whether or not vocabulary-acquisition is possible through the existing subjects? (Vocabulary-acquisition is imperative for reading comprehension.)
- How can *Chattanooga 2.0* support the Hamilton County Department of Education in ensuring that children (particularly from birth through third grade) learn to read, write, and speak with the competency needed for 21st-century literacy requirements?
- If we are to have a technical workforce in the future, how can Hamilton County schools support vocational avenues for the vast majority of students who will pursue technical degrees and jobs?

Challenge of and Measurement of Success

- How will the success of *Chattanooga 2.0* be measured?
- How will we know that the effort is having an impact?
- How can we sustain the improvements and how [can we] measure the impact for all students?
- How can we sustain and drive our plans for pre-K through 16 years while immediately making changes that will have an on impact students who are currently in our schools?

Local Politics

- How can we convince local and state politicians that comprehensive action is needed?
- What can we do about the vacuum of leadership among our elected officials regarding education and *Chattanooga 2.0*?
- Will elected officials support and fight for the yet-to-be-developed community plan? If not, what do we do?

Longevity and Monitoring of Transformation

- How do we change the attitude of the community toward the importance of education?
- How do we keep this initiative going?
- Are there other ventures like this going on in other communities? How are they working?
- Who will be accountable for the change?
- After questions are raised, who becomes responsible for tasking the solutions?

Assignment 2

Discussion Question: After the presentation, participants, in groups of four, discussed three assigned questions. Questions and responses are listed below.

Question 1. Do we have the collective will and courage as a community to do whatever it takes to ensure that all residents are able to benefit from the growing economic opportunity?

- We are not really sure if there is a collective will.
- There is a small amount of will, but more awareness about the truths in education and less finger-pointing need to take place. Total community involvement is needed—and private schools must be included.
- There is a will, but we don't know how to act on]it.
- There is a critical mass within the community that has courage. What is the rallying cry?
- What is being asked of community members must be clarified.
- The proposed changes need a foundation that will change mindsets and will include all sectors of the community. We do not have a choice!
- More marketing and storytelling about education need to take place. Politicians need to be involved, and racial and socio-economic status cliques must [end].

Question 2. Can all elements of our community work together to ensure that (a) every child comes to school ready to learn and (b) students and families have the support they need to achieve success?

Participants who responded to this question all believed that *Chattanooga 2.0* can be successful, but with the following caveats and stipulations:

- We are small enough in size and big enough in assets to make this work.
- Educators can advocate and facilitate collaboration.
- Are there are enough elements working together in the community to support these needs? And will that cooperation be enough to accomplish this?
- But will the means to success be based on politics and social aspects? Small wins will encourage this collaboration.
- But how? What are the overarching issues? We must come together regardless of geographic, social, and economic boundaries.
- With the right leadership and through establishing and building relationships. Elimination of pockets/silos of small communities that are doing well is needed to bring the community together.
- But how? There has to be a strong vision that is clear, feasible, and personal to receive a complete buy-in. Communication within the community to identify needs is necessary. Collaboration with universities and other partners will help.

Question 3. What gives you the confidence, in moving forward, that *Chattanooga 2.0* is different from previous education initiatives in Hamilton County?

Interestingly, as is evident from the following statements, three of the six responding participants provided answers for what *would* give them confidence rather than what *currently gives* them confidence in *Chattanooga 2.0*. Another respondent addressed both the current situation and future needs.

- Short-term wins would produce confidence.

- The initiative is good, but the issue is far beyond education. This must be [emphasized to produce] confidence.
- If all stakeholders come to the table and are ready to put their words into action, confidence would be instilled.
- The investment in time and attention proves to be different than previous initiatives. Also, money is not what started this process. Additional confidence would come if this conversation were open to the entire community where input can be given.
- Confidence stems from the role of the Chamber of Commerce in this initiative and the business argument for implementing it (rather than just the moral responsibility), as well as the community-engagement aspect.
- The fact that it is not being driven by grants. Community concern will drive the community engagement.

Assignment 3

Post-discussion Question: After the discussion, participants were asked to respond, in writing, to two additional questions.

Question 1. What is the most important thing you learned today?

Urgency for Change

- Change is a must!
- We don't have a choice.
- People care, and they want change to occur. We know we need to act and act now!
- There is a collective agreement that we have to do something. Doing nothing is not an option!

Need for Clear Goals and Ways to Reach Them

- There is a will to move forward with *Chattanooga 2.0*, but we have not yet developed all the questions that will get us to some answers.
- There is a willingness to find a direction and path without understanding the end-point.
- Everyone coming to the table must have the right intentions, will, and desire to see things change.
- We can honestly say that we do not know if we have the collective will.
- There is no agreement on next steps. Do we need strategies for people to engage in? Or do we need to focus on community engagement and defining questions?
- Our community suffers from educational issues; some people are concerned with the "feel-good" aspect of the work that is needed. There is a need for passionate citizens who are willing to make the necessary changes in the community.
- The difficult situation of local benchmarks in educational attainment.

Need For More Community Awareness and Engagement

- The community-at-large is generally ignorant about how bad schools are.
- We need to engage a more diverse community in this conversation.
- There are all sorts of groups that should be involved and we must establish ways for them to do so.
- We need more of the entire community involved.
- Community connection = a "critical mass" of residents.

Sociological Issues

- The challenge is great, and the issue goes beyond K–12 education.
- Part of the educational project needs to bring our students and families out of poverty.
- We are burying more children. (Stated by three participants.)

General Awareness About *Chattanooga 2.0*

- The basics of *Chattanooga 2.0* and the involvement of the people at my table.
- The community is willing to address the *Chattanooga 2.0* issue.
- There are passionate individuals in the community who are working toward reaching the goals of *Chattanooga 2.0.*

Question 2. What unanswered question(s) are you leaving with?

Need for Clarification

- Are we trying to address broader issues of class solely through educational policy?
- What is the vision? It needs to be crystalized or made clearer.
- What are the exact issues, and how do we inform others about them?

Need to Involve Others

- How do we get the word out?
- How can we activate people who do want to get involved? What roles can they play or activities can they do?
- How do we engage those who are not engaged?
- How do we get all communities involved?
- What do we ask individuals to do?
- What role can and should learning from other communities play in *Chattanooga 2.0*?

Misgivings

- Is there political will?
- Will there ever be a change? Who will start the process?
- How can we inspire confidence that this initiative (unlike similar initiative in the past) will actually transform the education and economic landscape in Chattanooga?

Need to Move Forward

- What are the next steps? Strategies? The vision is starting to emerge. We need to capture it and share it with passion.
- Where do we start?
- How do we start?
- Who steps up to begin this effort?
- What are the next steps for *Chattanooga 2.0* to take root and move forward?

Implementation

- How is *Chattanooga 2.0* different from other endeavors?
- Are we willing to listen, learn, and set up strategies that are not supported by all parties?
- How are we measuring our small wins? Our outcomes?
- How do we measure success?

<u>**Sociopolitical Issues**</u>
- Can we bridge social and economic gaps?
- Can we set apart geographic boundaries and look at the whole?
- Is this primarily a power struggle? If not, how is it not?
- Why are people not concerned about the education and poverty rates?

Participants

We would like to thank the following participants for their interest in and contribution to this McKee Learning Lunch.

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