

BREAKOUT SESSION TWO:

Education for an Evolving Economy – Public Education and Workforce Development in East Austin

- Tim Eubanks –(opening comments) Austin Voices for Education and Youth-- community activist, facilitates conversations between students and administrators through forums, workshops, rallies, etc. Works with Garza, LBJ, Akins, Johnston, as well as 15 middle schools in AISD.
- Introductions:

Loretta Edelen – 1st AISD trustee elected to the single-member district of East and Northeast Austin. Increased funding for East Austin schools. Currently the Community Outreach Director for ACC, works hard to increase awareness of ACC programs and services, with the aim of further increasing the diversity of the ACC population.

Jeffery Richard – member of ACC trustees since 2004, priorities include expanding opportunities for students throughout the region to pay less in ACC tuition, providing retraining services for adults to increase their marketplace demand, and enabling more students to pay for a community college education. In 2005, elected President and Chief Executive Officer of Austin Area Urban League, whose mission is to assist African-Americans and all persons to achieve economic and social equality. Prior to being elected to the AAUL, he was the Vice President of Education for the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, also a licensed Christian minister, serving in an associate capacity at St. James Baptist Church.

Johnny Townsend – Teen lead for Southwest Key Outreach and Tracking program, community activist, youth minister, small business owner, husband and father of 5.

Eva Rioz – Program Director for Capital IDEA since its inception, responsible for developing procedures and maintaining operations concerning career counseling and employment functions of the program

Erica Gonzales – Co-Director of PODER (People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources), responsible for coordinating all youth-related activities and supervising all youth organizers. Also co-coordinates several PODER projects around environmental, health, connections to indigenous practices, transportation, juvenile justice, communities and schools, and gender and resource equity issues. Also respected poet/activist.

- **Q:** (Posed by Tim and directed toward all panelists) How can East Austin schools better prepare students? What kinds of problems are East Austin

students and schools facing? How will schools be affected by changing demographics? What solutions are there for reducing the dropout rate and increasing the college-going rate?

Tim – I work a lot with students, so a lot of my perspectives and thoughts are shaped by students' perceptions and thoughts. So wherever I go, I try to share what I think they would share. Last Spring, hundreds of middle school students walked out of Kealing Middle School. They were chanting "one school; down with racism; unity." They marched to the Capitol, demanded to meet with AISD superintendent, Board of Trustees. A lot of people asked these students, who are only 11, 12, 13 years old, why they were so upset that they would walk out of school and march to the Capitol. They responded that every day, the announcement comes over the PA system stating that Kealing is *one* school with multiple programs and success for all. There are two programs that exist at Kealing – one that is largely for middle-class students across the city, and the other for low-class students from the Kealing area. Because of this, it is one of the most diverse middle schools in the district. So these students heard that the school was being split in two, and they said that this was racist and unfair. They organized themselves, came to the decision to walk out on their own. They got their wish, Kealing was not split into two. But the core issue here, of the education that middle income and low income students receive, remains in our district, and it has huge ramifications. What is the quality of education that someone from a low- vs. middle-income family receives? I think we've all seen the statistics here, and we can see that there is a crisis emerging in our country. If the drop out rate for low-income students does not close fast enough, and if the college-going rate does not increase fast enough, our economy and workforce will be damaged, and the quality of life will decline for all people in the coming generation.

That's huge, I mean that's gigantic. But I have to admit that that's not necessarily the main point for me. What I wonder about is those students in the Kealing neighborhood program, because they're so bright, they're so innovative, they were so effective. But what will their future hold? Will their education enable success for all, as the announcement states every day? Or will many of them end up on the battlefield, instead of in the college class room? Will they end up in a jail cell instead of running a small business? Will they have the choices in life that I've held so dear, or will they be confined in poverty because they haven't received an education that can prepare them for life?

Many studies have shown that we're facing a drop-out crisis: why? We used to think that, well classes are really hard so they're dropping out. But now we're realizing that the majority of our students don't feel respected on campus, they don't have a sense of ownership on campus. They also feel that there's a strong drive among a lot of students to make money, and they feel that their education is not relevant towards that purpose. It's not relevant toward their lives and cultures and communities. That their curriculum isn't even rigorous, that their

teachers just don't care. Many of them don't even have teachers, instead they have long-term substitutes. They don't have a connection to the school administration.

So that's what we know about how our students feel. But on the flip side of that, many adults and business owners in our community feel that our students have no sense of professionalism in the workplace, that students don't necessarily understand what it takes to succeed in the workplace. That their education seems not to have prepared them for life, that they lack employable skills. So if there are all of these complaints both from the student side and the business side, if we can agree that we are in the midst of a crisis, what can we do as a community to address that?

Loretta – For our future, college needs to be a part of every young person's future, whether that's short term or long term training. Because at least 80% of the jobs that become available in the next 20 years will require more than a high school education. For the class of 2006, Johnston High School had 35% of its graduating class enrolled in college for the fall of 2006, Regan had 36%, Travis had 35%, Garza had 43%. That picture is not a bright one. Our future depends on having an educated workforce. Looking at those numbers, we are not doing the job we need to be doing in terms of getting our students ready and engaged so that they're interested in pursuing college. Senator Kirk Watson recently spoke at Johnston to rally folks around the potential closure of JHS if they don't meet academic standards set by the state. Reality is that the academic focus, the expectations are clearly not where they need to be in order to help those students be successful. A very interesting picture was painted at a recent networking session held by Af-Am students – our wonderful trustee here [*Loretta indicates Jeffery*] started off by asking ACC students to stand and tell us where they planned on being in the next 5 years, what kind of career they were going to have, what their vision was going to be. We've got to help these student find that vision, we've got to help them figure out what that next step is going to look like. Setting expectations for them, helping them to do that goal setting, providing with the necessary tools for professional/academic success. And then rewarding them and setting up some form of accountability. We are clearly failing in those areas with our students. We as a district have to realize, I served on board from 1998-2002. 12 years ago, this district had a majority minority student population, now it is over 70% majority minority. We gotta do something different. We've got to increase our expectations for students, because I promise you they will live up or down to whatever those expectations are. We have got to set a higher standard for our students. We have got to recognize that our very future depends on their academic preparedness, their ability to be successful in the workforce. As a partner, we at ACC are trying to do our part by providing early college start (at the end of their 10th grade year, students are able to begin taking classes for free that count for HS and college credit).

Comment – I agree and disagree with what you're saying. I don't believe that it's just a matter of setting higher standards or raising accountability, because if we don't change the nature of the system, doing those things isn't going to heal it. We need to have an approach in which we can engage kids, as opposed to disengaging them. We don't engage them at school, we've created a structure where someone gets up and talks in the front of the classroom and the students sit there and they are disengaged, they are disconnected. We need to honor them. We need to listen to their voices and engage them in the process of learning.

Loretta- I agree that we have to engage our students, but we have to engage them in a very structured kind of way, especially in elementary school. We can't really just engage them in this kind of free-for-all discussion where they're their own teachers. We have to create some kind of structure that will enable them, once they get to the college level, to be successful. We have over 70% of our ACC students, as high school graduates, requiring developmental math. So clearly what you're saying about the system—we've got to change that system. A person I talked to not too long ago visited students in Africa, and they have over a 90% passage rate on their math. What's different about the picture? They don't have air conditioned rooms, they don't have computers. Yet they are all passing that math exam. So we've got to figure out, very similarly to the 6-point plan I came up with when I was on the board, how do we tap into the proven strategies for success in the diverse types of communities we're trying to reach? There are proven strategies. Back in 1995, there was a lady in Chicago running her own charter school, who was doing wonderfully with her students. There are some proven strategies for reaching the populations we're trying to reach. I just think that rather than reinventing the wheel, we need to be tapping into those resources and figuring out how we can work with our instructors to educate them, without losing our students at the same time.

The state uses the 3rd grade reading level as their way of predicting the amount of prison beds they'll need. They predict by 2020, 69% of college-going Af-Am males will be involved in the penal system. We have got to change that picture. Our young people need to find some creative, positive vision for themselves for what they can productively contribute to this community. One of our newest programs is "Men of Distinction," a focused effort on working with Af-Am men in a human development/college transition class. We're trying to be creative with our approach, and encourage you to provide us with any ideas/suggestions on how to do a better job.

Jeffery –*[asks for audience members to shout out their zip codes, records them on a rough map on the white board]* I can predict your yearly income. I can predict your lifetime earnings and potential based on your zip code. That should be offensive to you, but it's true. *[Draws vertical line down center of map]* That's not a river. Someone tell me what that is. *[Audience says "I-35"]* What you have in your hands is a map I did when I was Vice-President of the Chamber. What we

did is we asked a number of different data sources, “where are all of the highest-rated elementary/middle/high schools?” Then we put them on a map and guess what the map showed us? All of these schools were located on the WEST side of 1-35. Not a single one was on the East side (now I should mention that that was 2004 data). Since then, some have moved to the East side, but not many. It’s almost as if someone drew a line—and that’s also true, we know they did, in 1928 [see *Erica’s response for details*].

I believe that education is the greatest experiment, within another profound experiment in human existence, capitalism and democracy. There’s this idea, it’s not a proven fact yet, but there’s a hypothesis that you can really educate the many. I like to call this a difference between “assembly line” and “gourmet.” You know what a gourmet meal is- it’s made right there, customized for you. Assembly line assumes something about you and does it over and over again. Quantity vs. quality. The greatest question that still remains is whether we can take quantity and turn it into quality. Take quality to scale. Do a lot for a lot. It’s very easy to do a little for a lot of people, there’s no mystery in that. I believe that education is the best chance to do this. It impacts where you live and can live, what you know, who you associate with, what you think about the world.

Erica – I’d like to go back to the line that was drawn up here. That’s exactly what happened. In 1928, the City of Austin created a Master Plan, a very racist plan, which divided East and West. Anything industrial, anything hazardous, was placed in East Austin. At that time there were people of color living all over the city, but the relocated people of color to the East side of I-35.

In addition to the environment, PODER also addresses issues of education, because we have toxic industries in our community but we also have toxic schools in our community, that are not really doing their job. In 1995, PODER started a program called the “Young Scholars for Justice” program, because we realized that the elders are not going to be around forever. So the younger generation needed to start dealing with these issues in our community and our education system. One of the things that they’ve taken on, on top of the environment, is dealing with juvenile injustice in schools, a repeal of the “Zero Tolerance” policy in public schools. Drop out rates (or push out rates) haven’t changed since the 60s. What I think is very instrumental that we’ve done with young people is to say that they need to be at the table, they need to have a voice about what is created in schools. And if they’re not getting it in the schools, we need to make sure it’s happening in the community. The youth created a game, like Jeopardy, where you talk about history of the education system, and you put some numbers in there, and the students can say “Oh this is why that’s happening? Ok, this is what I think we should do about it.” We’ve taken that to different schools, even on a national level, and we’ve seen that what’s happening in schools in Austin is happening in LA, it’s happening in Louisiana. I passed out some information for you about the Jena 6, because I think that’s exactly what’s happening, even here in Austin. Youth of color being incarcerated, they’re being

pushed out of the schools, they're being put in the Texas Youth Commission—and that's been mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually messing with our youth. 2 out of 3 youth are being put in TYC for nonviolent offenses. In schools, they're being pushed or kicked out for nonviolent offenses, because we now see since the Drug Free Schools Act and the Gun Free Schools Act were passed, this Zero Tolerance policy makes it so easy to get expelled or suspended for minor offenses—having some that resembles a weapon but is not, like a pencil, or having something that is considered a drug, like a Midol pill. The statistics are alarming. In the 2004-2005 school year, there were 13% Af-Am students, and 28% were suspended, 26% were sent to in-school suspension. For Latinos, 55% of student population, 54% were suspended and 56% were sent to ISS. Of the Anglo students, 30% of the student population, only 16% were suspended and 17% were sent to ISS. I don't think these numbers have changes since then. When you look at teachers, only 7% of our teachers are Af-Am, 24% are Latino, and 67% are Anglo. So in conclusion I think we need more teachers of color but more importantly more teachers that care, and that aren't just going to resort to suspending our students.

Johnny – Our organization, we go into homes, we visit with families, and the portion of the program that I'm involved with is outreach and tracking. We deal with youth from Travis County, Gardner Betts, and TYC. What it consists of is 2 daily visits, 365 days a year. We go into schools and check on the student there, we report back to their probation or parole officer, and we try to give enforcement and encouragement to the student to stay in school, we aid them with bus passes, whatever we see as need inside the home. Before this, I was a youth organizer, and I had the opportunity to sit in with the owner of RunTex, Paul Paroza. He was handing out free pairs of shoes to kids if they participated in a marathon. In this meeting, one thing that stood out to me that is very important to what we're dealing with today, he said one word about these kids, about the youth. He said they are "demotivated," and this word has just reverberated in my head since then. Demotivation is what is killing our youth and the parents of our youth. Southwest Key brings focus to the home, we have some programs are case management, that provide counseling sessions with the whole family. But the root of this is that demotivation. We have not geared ourselves to put our youth into college as a whole. We have not said as a society that everybody's going to college and this is not an option. That's the missing part – we have the structures in place in East Austin, but not enough volunteerism, social work, people don't want to get grimy, they don't want to get in other peoples' business. We need to start saying when we see youth in the malls, "you're cursing in public, you don't need to do that, you need to be respectful." Most times, they're not going to respond to you in a negative way, it just depends on how you approach them. These youths have been placed in conditions to where they don't have grown-up answers to grown-up problems. It's unfair to them. It's our mission and goal to reeducate them about choices made in the home, that just because mother made this choice doesn't mean you have to keep that pattern

alive. The infrastructure is there, as far as facilities and programs, but the avenue, the lane, to send them straight to these places is not in place.

Eva – Capital IDEA works on lifting working families out of poverty by sponsoring educational services. The best way I can show you what we actually do is by sharing a story with you. Last Tuesday, we had a fundraising event, and one of our graduates from ACC was there (the majority of our students are pursuing associates degrees from ACC). What she shared with us was, “I came from a family of just men, I have three brothers. What my family believed was that I had to be a mechanic as well, just like my brothers, because that was the pattern in my family, out in Lampassas. But one day I said ‘no, I’m not gonna do that. I’m gonna be different from my brothers. I’m gonna work at Sonic and get tips.’” And that’s what she did. Finally she said, “I’m gonna move up the career ladder. I’m gonna move from the Lampassas Sonic to the Austin Sonic, because the tips will be even greater there!” And she did. After getting married and having kids she said she wasn’t able to support her kids on her Sonic salary, so she came to one of Capital IDEA’s orientations, and to make a long story short she’s now working as a sonographer at Seton hospital, and making 60K a year. She said “the best thing that has happened to me, is that with my kids there is no question about if you’re gonna go to college, but *which* college you’re going to go to.” We’re trying to really educate the East Austin population, including parents, because they’re going to be the ones to push their kids to go to college. Our orientations are held in East Austin so that they’ll be accessible to the population there. Capital IDEA has a demonstration project, with 22 participants, who will become teachers working with AISD, St. Edwards University, Huston-Tillotson, ACC. This cohort is just in the demo stage because it’s expensive, but also, we want to see if we can accomplish the outcomes we’re looking for – to get these teachers to stay in the neighborhoods where they live. We’re already training teacher assistants, they’re already in the district, already know what the teaching profession is about, and we’re trying to help them make it career for many more years.

Comment – A lot of us are working toward reform in education, but for individuals in the public, what we can do is touch one life at a time, even if you’re not an educator. I was an educator for 7 years, and my best story is that one of my students left a note on my desk that said “I want to thank you for helping me to believe that I was smart. Before I took your class I didn’t believe that I was smart, I was gonna drop out. Now that I know I’m smart, I’m gonna go to college, and you’re gonna see me playing college football in two years.” Positive reinforcement is very important. Students believe what they hear. Tell them that they have what it takes to succeed, and they’ll believe it. How can we change the system? Civic engagement. Promote voting among the masses. If we don’t do that, we will never change what our situation is.

Jeffery – What is the answer? The answer is, to me, very small and very large at the same time. One child at a time. If everybody would think of your favorite teacher, you know who it is, you know why, because that teacher gave you

individualized attention. The “gourmet” education. Teachers make THE difference. Insist on the best teachers for your children. We know at the district level which teachers have the best students, we have the data. But teachers need to care as well.

Tim – We recently held a voter registration drive at JHS, Regan, and Garza high schools, and in 3 hours we registered 23 new voters. What really was shocking to me was that so many students came up to us and said, “what’s voting?” They didn’t know what voting was, or what it means.

Comment – The first thing we don’t typically think of is, what is success? How we can define success? In this society, success is being defined by money. Everybody will say a child is successful after they make enough money. If we change this definition we can get better results in everything we do. When we talk about the “broken system,” what system are we talking about? Education or society as a whole? The schools can do only so much. You need to go to the base. The smallest cell of society is the family, and there, I believe is the broken system. If we don’t try to stimulate all of those things in the family, you will continue to see this demotivation. The role model is at home. Of course in the school you need to have role models of your own race as well, but if you don’t have support at home your head doesn’t work. Your teachers can talk and talk and you won’t be able to comprehend it. It’s a family problem.

Q: – If the goal is to prepare students to go to college and get better jobs, how do we incorporate into that goal not just making more money, how do we teach students to be more responsible owners of that money once they have it?

Johnny – It’s the family. It starts with making our youth accountable and responsible for a goal and helping them get there. You have to be able to teach them how to be accountable and to want to be accountable to these goals. What’s breaking down the family is that there aren’t enough examples. That quality is gone, it’s missing totally—people 30 and above want to live their own life, and that doesn’t include raising and training and making accountable somebody else, because they themselves don’t know how to get out of their own problems. How can you lead someone out when you can’t get out yourself? A lot of what I see that dominates is, the youth are not responsive to authority period, because they’ve been raised to just go play. “I’m busy, I have to take care of these bills, go play.” What do they learn outside? Whatever they can. Also, us forcing people to want what we want is part of the problem. We need to say, if true success to you, son, is working at Sonic, I want you to know that there are other options for you but if that’s what you want, we’re gonna support you. And you’re gonna come out on your little roller skates and be the best Sonic worker there is!

Loretta – Part of your training needs to be giving back and helping the next generation. If you can do it, if you sought out the Sonic or the health care facility,

if you set that goal, no matter what age you are someone is looking at you for a picture of success. You say you're not an educator, you *are* an educator. We all are, we all have the responsibility to help young people create a better vision for themselves.

Comment: I remember when East Austin was a community. If I did something on 10th street, Miss Somebody told my mama before I got home. Society is so changed, when I was going to school education was important, and my mom made sure I knew that. It's not getting across now for some reason. Why have we lost that? These kids don't go to school half the time, the parents don't know about it...it used to be that you could get a job with a high school education, but that's gone. We haven't caught up with that. The education system hasn't caught up to that, we're not teaching these kids that. It's not just the family. It's the schools, the teachers. I can remember teachers that made school so interesting! Some of these classes are so boring, they don't teach them to think, they're bored to death. It's not just one problem, it's a lot of different problems.

Comment – I agree whole-heartedly that there is a breakdown in the system. As minorities, we are going to have to go in and start pushing for better teachers, better educators. Our churches see the need, we need to have busses go and find those children and help them. Feed them, pick them up, take them where they need to go.