

Education plans unfold

Ruston 21 group makes recommendations

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The Lincoln Parish School System has a lot of different strengths — and a lot of different weaknesses — but the school system can overcome those weaknesses with a lot of help from the community.

Churches, businesses and parents are the ones who need to involve themselves the most.

Those were the conclusions of the Ruston 21 Education Committee, as presented to school board members at their regularly scheduled meeting Tuesday night.

Members of the community formed the committee last spring to find ways for the school system and the public to better support one another. Committee members said the school system and the public have to rely on one another especially because of one important factor — local economics.



“A community without a strong public education system cannot survive. There is a huge interlinkage between the quality of an education system and economics,” said Jo Ann Dausat, who co-chaired the Ruston 21 Education Committee.

Ruston Mayor Dan Hollingsworth, who participated in the committee, said something similar.

“Having excellent schools is one of the most important elements in economic development. It is very difficult to attract high-tech jobs and personnel to a community that doesn’t have an outstanding public school system,” Hollingsworth said.

Other communities have experienced the same types of problems that Lincoln Parish has, including an unacceptable dropout rate. Those same communities, such as Little Rock, Ark., overcame those problems, despite having more challenging socioeconomic and demographic conditions, Dausat said.

Lincoln Parish had a graduation rate of 76.5 percent for the 2007-08 school year, but that number dropped to 65.1 percent in the 2008-09 school year, according to released statistics from the Louisiana Department of Education.

According to the report

The school district should be more aggressive about getting parents involved in the school system. Members of the community, meanwhile, should be more aggressive about supporting the tax and bond issues needed to properly fund a school system. Other aspects of the parish’s education system need more attention, such as early childhood education programs, remediation programs, and the historically low performance of the I.A. Lewis school for sixth-grade students in Ruston. The Lincoln Parish School Board needs to pay greater attention to having an expanded school year and expanded school days, according to the committee’s final report.

Board members said they will work to follow up on the committee’s suggestions.

“No chain is any stronger than its weakest link. This effort will take all of us,” said board member Eddie Jones.

"It's strange that some people grow up in well educated homes and you expect them to go to Yale, and yet they end up in jail. And you have those you expect to go to jail, and they end up at Yale. Sometimes, even the best families can miss the mark, so we have our work cut out for us," Jones said.

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