



Photos by Layla Farmer

Parents take part in a session on bullying.

Schools initiative seeks to educate, empower parents

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

More than 50 parents convened at the Children's Museum of Winston-Salem last week to take part in the pre-holiday session of Parent Power, a new parental involvement initiative spearheaded by Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools.

Winston-Salem native and professional baseball player CJ Beatty addressed the parents at the start of the program last Thursday night. Speaking from personal experience, Beatty said the lessons parents try to teach their kids do resonate with the youngsters, even if it is not immediately apparent.

"Your kid needs you. They need the solid foundation at home, because at the end of the day, you're all they have," he remarked. "...By being here today, you deserve a pat on the back because you're taking a step in a positive direction."

The event included sessions on topics parents had said they were interested in learning more about during a previous gathering at Goler Enrichment Center last month, according to organizer Sharon Frazier.

Frazier, who spent 18 years as a home-school coordinator at Forest Park Elementary prior to taking on her current position as the school system's Title I Parent Involvement coordinator, says parental involvement has always been a high priority for her.

"They're our future," she said of the students. "We have to do everything we can. Too many are failing."

Workshop sessions ran the gamut and included addressing bullying, involving males in education, preparing and planning for college and connecting schools, families and communities.

Gang Prevention Specialist Solomon Quick of the Winston-Salem Police Department said proactive programs like the workshops have the power to deter kids from joining gangs.

"You're engaging parents, you're engaging students, but more so than anything, you're engaging communities," said Quick, who was on hand for the event. "This is really exactly what we are talking about when we say 'gang prevention.'"

While parents listened and learned, their kids enjoyed refreshments and a Polar Express Pajama Reading Party.

Children's Museum Executive Director Elizabeth Dampier said partnering with the school system was a good fit for the museum, which is seeking to broaden its reach and appeal within the community and increase its interaction with the school system.

"This is just a natural extension of what we're already doing. It celebrates the fact that we're opening the doors to the community and becoming a place where they can learn and play," Dampier stated. "...We want to be seen not just as a museum; we want to be seen as a community gathering place and a place of learning."

Lachelle Simmons



Sharon Frazier (right) and Elizabeth Dampier.



Bahja Melton



CJ Beatty



Solomon Quick

attended the event so that she will be better prepared to assist her daughter, Jamera King, a freshman at Reynolds High School. Simmons hopes to enroll her daughter in classes at the new Career Center next year, and said the meeting provided the perfect opportunity to learn about the school, which will open on the campus of Kennedy Learning Center.

"I try to stay active in my daughter's education because if I don't, then she'll think if I don't care, why should she?" said Simmons, who works as a packer in a local warehouse. "But if I put the effort forth, I feel like she will do the same."

The Polar Express PJ Party was an added bonus for Simmons, whose three year-old-son Jeremiah was elated to take part.

Three students from Kennedy Learning Center volunteered their time to help supervise the youngsters while their parents were in the sessions. Among them was Bahja Melton.

Bahja, a freshman in the school's Gateway program and a Crosby Scholar, said her own mother's interest in her education has inspired her to work harder at school.

"When my mom is involved, I like it," said Bahja, who hopes to become an attorney some day. "When she's involved, it makes me want to go further."

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