

City of Alachua

The Good Life Community



EDUCATION TASK FORCE STRATEGIC PLAN 2024

Adopted February 26, 2024

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MEMBERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

MEMBERSHIP

Jeffrey Means, Chair
Travis White, Vice Chair
Lynn Hayes, Member
Tanya Floyd, Member
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ADMINISTRATION

Mike DaRoza, City Manager
David Wisener, Staff Liaison

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Alachua City Commission determined the development of a strategy to improve the performance of schools within the City to be one of the highest-priority strategic initiatives within the 2023 Strategic Plan. Consequently, City Staff conducted research on peer cities across the United States that have become involved in improving education and found several that empowered special task forces to make recommendations to city governments on how best to proceed.

In response, the City of Alachua Education Task Force was created effective July 24, 2023 comprising of five (5) voting members and two (2) non-voting liaisons, one a member of the City Commission and one a member of City Staff, as appointed by the City Commission. The purpose of the Education Task Force is to recommend to the City Commission policies, procedures and suggestions for improving the quality of childhood education in the City, to include cooperation with all public, private and charter schools, and early childhood centers that offer preschool, daycare or Head Start.

The Education Task Force held regular meetings on August 22, October 24 and December 18, 2023 and a workshop on November 28, 2023 to receive input from the public and discuss potential tasks for the Task Force to focus on. At the December 18, 2023 regular meeting, it was determined to hold a workshop to establish a Strategic Plan to guide the Task Force's efforts. A subsequent, publicly-announced workshop was held on January 29, 2024 in which the Task Force and public in attendance selected six strategic initiatives that comprise this initial 2024 Education Task Force Strategic Plan.

The six selected initiatives are presented in this Strategic Plan in order of priority. Attendees of the January 29, 2024 workshop assigned a numeric rank (1-6) in order of priority (1 being the highest). Staff weighted each attendee's selections with a numeric score then added the points together to come up with a total score to determine the priority of the initiatives.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

The Staff Liaison further defined each Strategic Initiative as follows:

- State desired outcome;
- Provide summary background;
- Develop an action plan to accomplish the initiative;
- Provide the estimated completion date for each action item; and
- Create Critical Success Metrics to support progress report.

The Staff Liaison will present the Strategic Plan at an Education Task Force meeting and request review and adoption annually by a majority vote of the Education Task Force.

It is envisioned that the Education Task Force Strategic Plan will be a living document, subject to adjustments and revisions as deemed necessary by the Task Force and the Staff Liaison. The Task Force, by a majority vote, shall be able to add or remove initiatives in the Plan during the annual adoption process or more often if deemed necessary. The Staff Liaison shall have the authority to revise the activities necessary to carry out the initiatives as these may change from time to time and are administrative in nature. Such changes by the Staff Liaison shall be incorporated in the subsequent annual adoption process.

The Staff Liaison will monitor progress and provide regular updates of the Strategic Initiatives. These updates will be in the form of a progress report and will be produced biannually unless set otherwise by a majority vote of the Education Task Force. In addition, the Staff Liaison reserves the right to bring up specific Strategic Initiatives to the Task Force if discussion is warranted.

Particular attention will be afforded to the metrics defined to support initiative progress. Some will be easily quantifiable. Other initiatives do not lend themselves to be easily measured, and the Staff will provide specific events and milestones that can be presented to the Education Task Force.

The ultimate goal of a Strategic Plan is to develop and implement specific action plans so that the community's growing needs and future vision are met in an efficient and equitable way.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1

Reestablish the City Mentor Volunteer Program and include community businesses and nonprofit organizations

Desired Outcome: A thriving volunteer program in school systems can have a significant impact on the lives of children in several ways as they are shown that people in the community truly care about them. The establishment of a robust mentor volunteer program for City and community business employees and nonprofit partners is the desired goal.

Completion Date: August 2024 and ongoing

Background: The City of Alachua had a successful and active Mentor Volunteer Program (MVP) for several years in which City Staff were given paid time to volunteer as mentors for children in community schools. The program unfortunately came to a halt during the COVID Pandemic in 2020 and has not yet been reestablished. Both relaunching this program and broadening its scope to include as many community businesses and nonprofits as are willing is the aim.

Action Plan for 2024:

Action Steps		Estimated Completion Date
1.	Relaunch MVP for City of Alachua Staff.	April 2024
2.	Invite members of the Alachua Chamber of Commerce, Alachua Business League, Progress District and San Felasco Tech City businesses, and nonprofits to create a similar program within their companies or organizations.	May 2024
3.	Coordinate involvement with community schools in anticipation of the beginning of School Year 2024-2025.	August 2024

Critical Success Measures:

- Have active and engaged employees from the City and community businesses and nonprofit members involved in mentorship with community schools by the start of School Year 2024-2025.
- Make the MVPs sustainable so that involvement continues indefinitely going forward.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2

Create a centralized website to provide information for all education resources available for parents, teachers, students and potential residents

Desired Outcome: Launch and promote the existence of a website that acts as a central hub for all education resources available for parents, teachers and potential residents of the City of Alachua.

Completion Date: June 2024

Background: There are a large number of great resources that are readily available for parents and teachers through various organizations and programs but are not broadly known by the general public. Several stakeholders have mentioned that communication about many of these existing resources is one of the greatest weaknesses. The City intends to address this weakness by creating an online hub to act as a kind of one-stop spot for all education resources available to people involved with education in the City of Alachua.

Action Plan for 2024:

Action Steps		Estimated Completion Date
1.	Discuss at April 29, 2024 Education Task Force meeting what content should be included on website; schedule a workshop if desired.	April 2024
2.	Work with Public Information Officer to design website appearance.	May 2024
3.	Finalize design and population of resources on website, then launch.	June 2024
4.	Aggressively advertise website through social media, print and community announcements.	June 2024

Critical Success Measures:

- Launch comprehensive resource website and track website engagement to ensure it is being utilized.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 3

Promote and advocate for home visitation programs for families of children aged 0 to 5

Desired Outcome: Increase parent awareness of home visitation programs offered through the School Board of Alachua County (SBAC) and Healthy Start of North Central Florida Coalition.

Completion Date: Ongoing

Background: City Staff met with Dr. Herman Knopf, senior research scientist for the University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies, on September 12, 2023 as part of its efforts in collecting data and suggestions to assist education in the community. Dr. Knopf stated at this meeting his opinion that home visitation programs such as Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) offered by SBAC and Parents as Teachers offered by Healthy Start of North Central Florida Coalition are quite effective in improving children’s learning development.

Action Plan for 2024:

Action Steps		Estimated Completion Date
1.	Connect with SBAC HIPPY Coordinator Stacey Hill to coordinate promotion and discuss holding possible events.	March 2024
2.	Connect with Healthy Start of North Central Florida Coalition to coordinate promotion and discuss holding possible events for Parents as Teachers Program.	March 2024
3.	Begin enacting promotion ideas, at minimum promoting both programs through social media and the City’s centralized educational resource website.	June 2024 and ongoing

Critical Success Measures:

- Increase enrollment of City of Alachua-based families in home visitation programs.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 4

Work with the School Board of Alachua County (SBAC) and private childcare organizations to expand the number of Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) classes in the community

Desired Outcome: Increase the number of VPK classes in the community.

Completion Date: July 2024

Background: City Staff met with Dr. Herman Knopf, senior research scientist for the University of Florida Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies, on September 12, 2023 as part of its efforts in collecting data and suggestions to assist education in the community. Dr. Knopf directed Staff to the Center’s online Sunshine Portal to research enrollment and capacity for early learning centers within the City. The results showed that early learning centers are operating at approximately 85% capacity, which Dr. Knopf stated is indicative that additional capacity is needed in the community. Additionally, Trisha Nieves, Family and Community Engagement Administrative Coordinator for SBAC, reached out to the City on January 10, 2024, regarding the possibility of assisting with funding for an additional VPK class at W.W. Irby Elementary School because of the high need.

Action Plan for 2024:

Action Steps		Estimated Completion Date
1.	Work with SBAC to determine the funding need for an additional VPK class at Irby for School Year 2024-2025.	March 2024
2.	Contact all private childcare providers within the City to discuss the possibility and resource requirements for adding additional VPK classes.	April 2024
3.	Research sustainable funding sources from public and private sectors to provide needed resources.	July 2024

Critical Success Measures:

- Increase the number of VPK classes in the community.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 5

Identify sustainable funding sources from the private sector and/or State and Federal Government for subsidizing high-dose tutors and family liaisons

Desired Outcome: Find sustainable funding sources to enable Alachua public schools to keep high-dose tutors and family liaisons that have been serving them.

Completion Date: July 2024

Background: Alachua community public schools have been served by two positions – high-dose tutors and family liaisons – that were funded by Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds from the Federal Government that were part of the American Rescue Plan enacted in response to the COVID Pandemic. These funds will be ending at the close of 2024, and the School Board of Alachua County has not committed funding to continue supporting either high-dose tutors or family liaisons. Local school officials, however, have stated that both these positions are very important and valuable to community schools and should be kept if possible.

Action Plan for 2024:

Action Steps		Estimated Completion Date
1.	Determine the amount of funding needed to maintain the current positions.	March 2024
2.	Research sustainable funding sources from public and private sectors.	May 2024
3.	Coordinate with SBAC on the possibility of transferring funds (once found) in order to maintain current positions.	July 2024

Critical Success Measures:

- Find sustainable funding sources to enable Alachua public schools to keep high-dose tutors and family liaisons.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 6

Coordinate with the Alachua Chamber of Commerce and Optimal Station to provide book vending machines in community schools

Desired Outcome: Place book vending machines in community schools to reward children with free books.

Completion Date: July 2024

Background: Alachua-based business Optimal Station offered to donate some of their specialized vending machines to community schools to carry books that children can get for free by earning tokens in school. Optimal Station is tentatively working out a partnership with the Alachua Chamber of Commerce to fund the sustainable acquisition of books to stock the vending machines.

Action Plan for 2024:

Action Steps		Estimated Completion Date
1.	Coordinate remaining needs with Optimal Station and the Alachua Chamber of Commerce.	April 2024
2.	Contact community schools to ensure interest and coordinate placement of vending machines.	May 2024
3.	Ensure participating community schools create a program for children to earn tokens to get free books.	June 2024
4.	Coordinate with Optimal Station and community schools to place vending machines in schools.	July 2024

Critical Success Measures:

- Successfully place book vending machines in community schools to allow children to earn free books.