



Wednesday, April 25, 2007

Editorial

'Success' plan deserves hearing

The past four years have seen three governor's summits of vital interest to the Louisiana Delta — one each on poverty, health care and economic development. It's not news: East Carroll, Madison and Tensas have Louisiana's most indelible problems with those issues.

What is not clear — summits aside — is whether Louisiana is dedicated to resolving them. Or that a solution is within grasp.

Recent news that the Louisiana Delta Coalition for Education and Economic Development is in line for a grant of up to \$600,000 is far from enough to resurrect hope of returning the Delta to a viable economic asset. But it has resurrected the conversation.

It has resurrected the Coalition's hope of turning Steve Hoyle Rehabilitation Center into a school for adults — a plan introduced in 2004 when the state Department of Corrections opened the rehab center after shutting down a juvenile detention facility. And it has again highlighted the area's ratios of high school dropouts, residents living in poverty and uncertified teachers (all of which hover near or above 30 percent).

We've heard such numbers for years. What we haven't heard are the results of an in-depth 2006 study assessing the educational needs of these parishes.

The study, conducted by an outfit called the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems and commissioned by the Louisiana Board of Regents, concluded that the Success Center idea is a good one. It concluded that traditional education has not worked and will not work.

That is especially true in districts with underqualified, underpaid teachers where locals say that President Bush's No Child Left Behind program has created new dysfunction. While Bush's mandate was designed to improve education, encouraging schools to attain minimum accountability scores, people in Tallulah say the law has undercut vocational programs and student-support services in poor schools.

At the Tallulah headquarters for the Louisiana Delta Resource Center, CEO Moses Williams and countless volunteers created several services that, on a tiny scale, may serve as a model for the Success Center. With a similar grant a few years ago from the Kellogg Foundation, the Resource Center created community service programs that teach basic skills for

prospective job applicants, offer savings incentives for those living below or modestly above the poverty level, and educate prospective homebuyers.

These skills taught on a larger scale could help create a viable work force — which the area needs for economic development. The Success Center model even offers its own economic development: It would house a modular-housing factory where students could apply newly learned skills. All that's needed now is state ownership of the Hoyle Center, which is in the works, and legislative approval.

We believe the river parishes can be assets to our state. But they need fundamental change. These small civic alliances — LDCEED and the Delta Resource Center — may be the agents for such change.

We should consider empowering them to do their work. The Legislature should give its attention to what is proposed.

<http://www.thenewsstar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070425/OPINION01/704250315/1014/OPINION>