

MEETINGS ARE OUR FACTORIES

For most of my adult life, I have had to go to meetings. I have even done my share of creating meetings. I am not sure what the value was of each of those meetings, but I can tell you many of them were worthless. There are so many ways of setting up or running a meeting that my mind freezes when trying to list them. Therefore, I will not try.

When I go to a meeting that has meaning and runs well, I am delighted and enthused. Such a meeting was called recently by Marc Drews, the Director of Strategic Partnerships at the EdVenture Children's Museum in Columbia, SC. Besides his work with the museum, he is also the President of the South Carolina Teachers of Mathematics. Maybe it's his math background that allows him to create a meeting which flows perfectly, finishes each section of the meeting on time, includes all attendees from 30 disparate education and teacher organizations and comes to conclusions and next steps.

This was no ordinary meeting with people speaking of their own points of view. We were there to create partnerships that would act collectively to improve education in South Carolina. It stemmed from the 10,000 teacher march on the capitol on May 1. On that day, teachers from all corners of the state converged on Columbia to request that the legislature and the governor to move on education reform that might move the state ahead in education.

Yes, there were calls for increases in teacher salaries (one of the lowest in the U.S.), but also calling for items that the legislature had been working on and not completed. The result of the Walk was some movement by the House of Representatives and future plans for meetings with teachers and the Speaker of the House and Chairlady of the House Education Committee. Those will take place at the end of September. This meeting was an outgrowth of that march.

Minutes of that meeting:

On Wednesday, July 10 (ten days ago), a group of 40 leaders from over thirty of the state's professional organizations met at EdVenture to take steps to forge a stronger network designed to strengthen support to children, their families, and their teachers--especially in areas of our state that need us to speak on their behalf the most.

Once again, many thanks to those who accepted the invitation to attend a gathering of leaders of professional organizations and demonstrating your dedication to supporting our state's teachers and their students. Our purpose of the day was to engage in a discussion about the systemic issues facing our state, with plans to frame those issues into agreed-upon, clear and concise statements that we would like to see our legislators and decision makers address. The day's conversation was all about making connections with others who share a passion for what is right for all of South Carolina.

It was important to have the many organizations at the table so more groups from across the state become more aware of the outstanding work that's going on supporting our teachers and schools. Honestly, the group had the chance to see many friends make some great new connections, as well. Everyone agreed they learned some and wanted to connect with others in the room after the meeting. The camaraderie and trust that was established was particularly noteworthy and the desire to move forward was very evident. Though we were through by 2:45, the last of the participants left the building after five, as conversations and connections continued long after the room was cleaned.

As a group, we looked at what it was that we wanted. Based on the day's conversations, there was a general consensus that, as a group, we begin to take steps to do the following (as listed on the poster paper):

1. Schedule and conduct a follow-up meeting for sustainable change and coalition building.
2. Encourage all of our organizations to work collaboratively on issues related to access and equity.
3. Identify four to five actionable items and develop a plan to accomplish them with the people in the room.
4. Establish a unified voice that communicates a common goal as to the importance of the key points from the teachers.
5. Create a coalition to help communities better understand and support the tenets of the Profile of SC Graduate.
6. Commit to continuing our collaboration that is centered around leveraging our limited resources.

After a review of the items listed, we can cluster them as:

- Organize (Items six and one are both about creating a network and collaboration)
- Identify issues to address (Item 3, that leads nicely to)

- **Address the issues (we have some of them identified as items 2 and 5, with item four being less specific)**

That being shared, we can summarize our commitment to

- **Organize a network of leaders from our state's professional organizations who are dedicated to improving the lives of children, their families and their teachers;**
- **work with others in the network to strengthen their membership's understanding of issues related to access and equity, as well as the tenets of the Profile of the SC Graduate (<https://ed.sc.gov/about/profile-of-sc-graduate/>); and**
- **identify a couple of other issues that they would like to address during the year (ideally from those identified and discussed during the day: Building Leadership, Community Involvement, Funding, Retention, Recruitment, Student Support, and Teacher Pay.**

Therefore, with that in mind, I offer the following statement as a personal commitment.

As president of the South Carolina Council of Teachers of Mathematics, I plan to work with our Board to agree to be a part of this network, to continue our work to strengthen our members' understanding of issues related to access and equity, to support the tenets of the Profile of SC Graduate with our members, and initiate efforts to build leadership within our organization and promote efforts to keep our teachers in the classroom (retention).

Our organization will begin working with partner entities to take steps to identify specific action items, timelines, and strategies to assess effectiveness.

As a leader in your respective organization, will you join me in expressing what you would like to do to support our network in a similar manner?

Would you agree to meet again to connect with other organizations who will be working on similar issues?

Let's agree to let this email serve as the next step in our collective efforts to support one another on this journey.

Here's to historic first steps,

Marc

Marc Drews

Director of Strategic Partnerships

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