

Teachers learn about efficacy, try to raise grad rate

Andrew J. Yawn, *Montgomery Advertiser* 1:33 p.m. CDT August 22, 2015



(Photo: Mickey Welsh / Advertiser)

The goal of the Delta Teacher Efficacy Campaign is to raise the local graduation rate to at least 80 percent by 2020.

School officials and teachers alike attended Saturday's Town Hall Teachers Event at Alabama State University with the goal of improving teacher efficacy, and subsequently meeting that goal.

The event was free to the public and allowed local education workers the chance to hear ideas from some of the top teaching minds.

"It's like I'm having an 'Amen' session, because I agree with everything they're saying," said Millbrook Middle School Library Media Specialist Yvette Johnson.

The five-person panel included Auburn University of Montgomery Associate Professor of the College of Education Dr. Connie Buskist, Montgomery Public Schools Elementary Executive Director Ms. Jacquelyn Campbell, ASU Department of Education Educational Specialist Dr. Miranda Bissoo, Elmore County Board of Education Superintendent Dr. Andre Harrison, and Montgomery Public Schools CEO Dr. Christopher Blair.

The panel answered questions on improving teaching efficacy and student engagement. One of the primary obstacles teachers face, according to the panel, is not knowing the backgrounds of each of the students.

Dr. Harrison pointed out that a student's bad attitude can often be attributed to domestic issues such as a lack of proper meals or being one of many children in a single-parent household. In short, sometimes a student's inability to learn is not for lack of ability, and teachers need to know their students in order to be effective.

"Find out who you are teaching," Harrison said. "Read every student's record."

Sometimes a child's lack of interest or results can lead a teacher to believe that student is unteachable, said Dr. Buskist. To her, that's unacceptable.

“We need to move teachers into thinking all children can learn if they’re given proper instruction and support,” Biskist said. She cited teaching children to read as an example.

The panel also discussed how technology can improve a teacher’s connection with students.

Harrison and Bissoo emphasized the importance of technology with Bissoo citing evidentiary research on the benefits of technological tools. Harrison warned that teachers must know how to use equipment such as smart boards in order for it to be useful, but Dr. Blair emphasized that technology should be a supplement, not the lesson.

“Teachers have to deconstruct the priorities and teach with the end in mind,” Blair said. “Only use technology if it’s going to supplement the learning.”

The panel also mentioned the difficulty in retaining new teachers in a time where teaching methods, curriculum and technology are in flux. To him, aspiring teachers should have a mentor before they ever get a degree in order to help with the transition.

As a media specialist, Yvette Johnson often supports teachers’ lessons by assisting with media or technology. On Saturday, Johnson heard a lot of information she wants to share with those teachers.

“They feel like this is one of those campaigns that will be a support to them,” Johnson said. “I want to go to our county and tell more people that the campaign is out and is a step to getting them a voice. If you bring teachers together, we all understand that language.”