

Collaboration Florida Style

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Abstract — A Successful Florida Collaboration

What do you get when school districts, businesses, colleges, governmental agencies, the governor's office, students, parents all collaborate in Florida? You get Take Stock in Children, an innovative scholarship mentoring program that gives low income students higher education aspirations.

Index Terms — Florida Collaboration, Diverse Mentoring, at-risk-students).

Take Stock in Children is a statewide, school-based mentoring and scholarship program for low-income at-risk children in Florida. A premier mentoring program in the nation, Take Stock in Children's uniqueness and success is grounded in the realization that it takes the efforts of many to positively impact one child. Founded in 1995, the program has grown from a small program in one county to one serving more than 7,000 students in every corner of the state. Designed to eliminate the cycle of poverty and violence and to increase school performance, Take Stock in Children provides trained, dedicated mentors who meet weekly with each child from middle school through high school graduation.

The state of Florida houses a culturally diverse rapidly growing population. The rapid growth in population is in large part due to the influx of immigrants into the state. Immigration statistics reveal that 85% of all newcomers to Florida are foreigners. Both the Asian and Hispanic populations have increased significantly in the past decade. This influx has created overcrowding in schools, burdens to the government systemically and financially, and in increased numbers of children in poverty. One in four children in Florida lives in poverty according to the federal guidelines. Almost half of the state's students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. Research demonstrates that living in poverty has profound physical, social, emotional, and psychological effects on children.

The existence of differential opportunity for children in poverty is the source of poor school performance and juvenile delinquent behaviors. Children in poverty develop a normlessness that results in a lack of standards and values held by the rest of society.

Inequities with means to obtain goals or opportunities can cause anger, frustration, and a feeling of social dependency that rejects rules for acceptable behavior and the need for achievement. These inequities are exacerbated by cultural discrepancies and deepening poverty due to overcrowded conditions and economic hardship. A proven method for prevention and intervention of delinquent behavior and school failure is school-based mentoring combined with strong program support, dedicated and trained mentors, family involvement, school participation, and community partnerships.

Mentors are a key element in reaching at-risk children. Building on a relationship of trust, mentors can unlock and guide students through their fears, confusion, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness. By being a good listener, responder, and role model, a trained mentor can demonstrate that there are actions and values that can lead a child toward a life that has rewards for him/herself through planning, direction, and responsible behaviors. This interpersonal and intrapersonal approach allows the child to develop not only hope for the future but the blueprint to pursue a productive life through understanding of the steps and beliefs necessary to act on getting there.

Through longitudinal and dedicated mentoring, Take Stock in Children provides a cornerstone from which a student can begin a new way to look at the world. Through the four year tuition scholarship, the program provides each student with the tools and means to break the cycle of poverty. Currently the program demographics report the student population to be 37% Caucasian, 36% African American, 21% Hispanic, 2% Asian and 4% multi-racial. Females make up 53% of the students. Over 60% of the mentors have mentored the same student for more than two years. The program dropout rate is less than 10%.

While mentors and scholarships are the resources to make a difference in a child's life, making this happen cannot occur in isolation. The communities in which the child lives play vital roles in ensuring the child's success through a variety of collaborative elements.

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The following are necessary elements in the Take Stock in Children family of partnerships that make the program work:

1. **Schools:** Take Stock in Children must collaborate with local schools as they a) provide the environment and vehicle for mentoring to occur, b) provide resources to mentors to aid in academic instruction, c) provide important data on the student to measure progress, d) provide instructors, guidance counselors, and pertinent staff to give mentors and students guidance, and e) provide space, expertise, and participation in informational parent meetings.
2. **Educational Foundations:** Local educational foundations are sources of support in a variety of ways. In many counties, they house the Take Stock in Children program personnel such as the case manager, mentor and program coordinators. They oversee operations, advocate for the program, and help with funding projects.
3. **Children in Schools (CIS):** This important organization collaborates with Take Stock in Children in much the same way as the Educational Foundations do. Working side by side, CIS and Take Stock in Children recruit mentors, design financial plans and projects, advocate for the students, and sometimes share personnel.
4. **Community Colleges and State Universities:** These Florida higher education institutes provide a wide array of services to the Take Stock in Children program. Some act in the same capacity of the Educational Foundations and CIS while others help streamline the transition from high school to college for the program's students. These institutions help with data analysis, promote monitoring Take Stock in Children during their college experience, and work with the program in any capacity that is needed.
5. **Florida's Department of Education (DOE):** An important source of funding in legislative dollars is the support of the Department of Education. Providing operational costs for all Take Stock in Children programs demonstrates the department's support of its efforts and results. In addition, the DOE will provide statistical information and resource support whenever asked by the program.
6. **Workforce Florida:** This organization has provided extensive scholarship and operational dollars to Take Stock in Children. In addition, they provide mentors and advocacy for the program.
7. **Civic Organizations:** Organizations such as Chambers of Commerce; Rotary, Kiwanis and women's clubs; and professional scientific and engineering societies all collaborate with Take

Stock in Children by providing mentors, funding, event support, and advocacy. These organizations work closely with local programs to aid in activities that will help the student. They recruit mentors, raising scholarship funds and publicize the program.

8. **Law Enforcement:** Many local programs recruit mentors through law enforcement. Officers serve as mentors throughout the state. These officers also participate in meetings and presentations to students to help them to understand consequences of thought and action that are irresponsible to the community.
9. **Corporations:** Leading corporations statewide provide a tremendous amount of support to the Take Stock in Children program. Thousands of mentors are professionals who give their time to their student. Additionally, corporations provide much of the scholarship monies for the students as well as advocate for the program in the community. Partnerships with Outback Steakhouse, JM Family Enterprises, Publix Super Markets, AutoNation, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Coldwell-Banker, AT&T, and Darden Restaurants have led not only to mentors and scholarships but also to the development of important resources for mentors.

In addition to collaboration with these entities, Take Stock in Children matches mentors with students whose interest lies in a particular area. With all of the above collaborators, it is possible to match a student who is interested in engineering with an engineer; a student who is interested in business with a professional businessman; a student interested in the restaurant field with a master chef or executive manager; a student who is interested in math with an accountant. The mentor pool produced by these collaborations makes all things possible for each child and his/her goals for a career. Take Stock in Children program actively encourages female students to consider careers in science, math, engineering and technology.

Take Stock in Children is a comprehensive strategy for helping at-risk, low-income children have the opportunity, resources, and tools to be successful in life and productive in society. Through its numerous collaborations, Take Stock in Children has found a formula for providing its students with support and guidance towards a life that they can control through positive feelings, thoughts, and actions.

A model for the nation, Take Stock in Children is strongly supported by Governor Bush, Lt. Governor Jennings, leading cabinet members, and key legislators, many of whom are mentors for the program. Headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida, Take Stock in Children is open to

sharing its methods, strategies, accountability measures, ideology, and operations with other non-profits and organizations striving to find the model for providing hope through mentors and scholarships.

Women in science, engineering and technology, such as WEPAN members, can use this collaboration as a model for engaging in programs to encourage girls to consider science, engineering and technology career preparation.