

Communicating Around The Kitchen Table

Many families with children know a secret: Some of the best communication takes place when parents and youngsters gather around the kitchen or the dining room table for a meal. We haven't done a scientific study, but we believe it's true that families that regularly break bread together have fewer disagreements and a better understanding of each other.

So the Durham Public Schools' first "Kitchen Table Conversation" may not have technically been held in a kitchen, but the title was appropriate, because the purpose was to improve communication and understanding among the members of the Durham Public Schools' family.

About 100 people -- teachers, students, parents, and others who are interested in public education -- gathered around red and white tablecloths at White Rock Baptist Church Thursday night October 19, 2006. The purpose of the gathering was broad and deep -- to share the participants' visions for public education.

One of the chief proponents of the get-together was Board of Education Chairwoman Minnie Forte-Brown, who heard about the idea at a school system in Maryland. When she suggested it to other school board members, they agreed it would fit in well with one of the board's top goals this year -- community involvement.

Throughout her time on the school board, Forte-Brown has emphasized positive communication with the community. One of her previous concepts was to hold meals before board meetings so the public could meet board members. She deserves congratulations for her efforts to get citizens involved in public education.

It was also great to hear that Superintendent Carl Harris was there, meeting people and listening to their ideas. It hardly needs mentioning that this picture of civil communication between school board members, school staff and the community is like a breath of fresh air for this board.

From the participants who attended the first Kitchen Table Conversation came these three priorities for educators to ponder:

- Access to a complete and equitable education;
- Teacher efficacy and competence;
- Cultural congruency.

Those certainly sound like laudable goals. Now it's up to the school board members to weave what they hear from citizens into policy decisions.

If you would like to comment on your own vision for public education in Durham, the school board is planning more gatherings around the kitchen table. Stay tuned for dates and times, and join in the conversation.