

## Press Release

Education Summit  
January 20, 2004  
Martinsville High School

Mr. Donald R. Hodges, Chairman of the Board of Directors of The Harvest Foundation, is looking ahead to The Education Summit to be held on January 20. "It will be a symbolic beginning for the newly formed partnership between educators in Martinsville/Henry County and The Harvest Foundation to focus on a five-year effort to provide financial and technical resources to improve student performance in reading and math. I believe that it will show what we can do when we all work together on a common goal."

On Tuesday, January 20, all professional staff of The Henry County Schools, The Martinsville City Schools and The Carlisle School - more than eleven hundred in total - will gather at Martinsville High School for a day-long Education Summit to formally begin a five-year crash effort to improve the approaches and strategies used by teachers in reading and math.

This is the first time within memory that an extraordinary gathering of this sort has taken place in Martinsville and Henry County. "We hope, that it will send a powerful message to our community that we are all in this for the long haul and that the creation of quality schools is a major goal of The Foundation," stated Don Hodges.

The Education Summit will feature an opening Keynote entitled "The Power of Teachers" by Ms. Alma Hills, a distinguished educator from San Diego and one-time San Diego Teacher of the Year. Ms. Hills works in some of the most economically depressed areas of her community and continues to realize remarkable results with youngsters that others give up on.

In addition, the day will include an array of concurrent sessions led by distinguished educators from around the nation gathered together by The Harvest Foundation for the Summit. These presentations, according to Superintendent Sharon Dodson of Henry County, "will widen the lens of what teachers believe to be possible as they strive to bring all students up to the Commonwealth of Virginia standards in the basics." Ms. Allyson Rothrock, Assistant Executive Director of the Harvest Foundation put it another way: "If we don't provide teachers with new and hopefully more effective ways of teaching our children, the future will look exactly like the past that we are all working so hard to improve." A list of these concurrent sessions is appended to this press release.

A special feature of the morning will be large and small group presentations by districts and schools that have made remarkable improvements in reading and math. "These are the veterans, they have some of the answers, and they can be helpful to our own teachers and principals," commented Mr. Hodges.

Among these presentations are three led by Mr. Samuel Williams, Principal of Velasco Elementary School, Ms. Clara Sale-Davis, Principal of Freeport Middle School, and Ms. Grace Walkes, Principal of The Ninth Grade Center, all in Brazosport, Texas. The Brazosport School District leads the nation in efforts to close the achievement gap regardless of the impact of poverty on youngsters.

Other presenters represent schools in Atlanta (Georgia), Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina), Chowan-Edenton (North Carolina), Avoyelles Parish and Natchitoches Parish (Louisiana), and Fort Lauderdale (Florida).

Harry Cerino, Executive Director of the Harvest Foundation, in reflecting on one of the purposes of the Summit, commented, "It's important in our somewhat isolated part of Virginia that we access the best examples of school improvement in the country and the best people to help us achieve improved performance for the students in our schools. We are assembling these folks in one place on January 20."

Finally, during the afternoon hours of January 20, there will be provision for full school staff meetings focused on reflecting upon and possibly integrating some of the most promising new ideas and approaches presented during the morning sessions.

All schools in The Martinsville City and Henry County School Districts have been the recipients of Harvest Foundation Education Initiative Planning Grants preparatory to developing full proposals for the improvement of teaching and learning in reading and math over a five year period. Planning grants totaling \$285,000.00 were distributed to City and County Schools and The Carlisle School on December 9, 2003, to be used between the period December 15, 2003 and April 10, 2004. These planning grants will be followed by five-year implementation grants to schools for long-term comprehensive improvement in teaching and learning. City Schools Superintendent, Ira Trollinger, said of the Foundation grants "These Education Initiative grants to schools have the potential of providing the fuel we need and have heretofore lacked as we power-up everyone's energies on behalf of kids. We've always had the plans but not the means. Now we believe we have both."

Additional background on this first phase of The Harvest Foundation Education Initiative is appended in the form of a Questions and Answers document.

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