

Wicked Problem Discussion: Education and Poverty

By Sharia Hudson

On August 28, 2014, over 30 individuals, ranging from elected officials, Birmingham Board of Education members, the publisher from Weld, and concerned citizens, gathered at UAB'S Edge of Chaos for the "Wicked Problem" discussion. This discussion, which focused on the poverty and education in Birmingham, is the third session to discuss and implement strategies on how to mitigate poverty in the local area while improving education simultaneously.

Kay Kornmeier, the facilitator of the session, challenged the group to focus initially on the successful aspects of education in the Birmingham City Schools. Randall Woodfin, the President of the Birmingham City School, noted that better leadership and those who understand their role has gradually improved the academic performance of the school system. He stated that the school system is finally "heading in the right direction".

Birmingham City Schools Superintendent Dr. Craig Witherspoon presented statistical support for the notion that dropout rates are decreasing and test scores are on the incline; these statistics were challenged by other participants who indicated that they didn't believe that these numbers reflected lack of adequate education in several key areas. Moreover, these numbers failed to reflect dropout rates accurately as they only tracked a student's 4-year progression through high school, and did not account for students who required an extra year in school, who had been held back a grade and subsequently dropped out of high school, or who changed to another school system and then dropped out.



Although the statistics reflect that the Birmingham City School System has progressed, there is still substantial room for more advancement in the academic performance of local schools, most of the participants agreed. Susan Diane Mitchell indicated that the city's lack of educational funds plays a vital role in textbooks and education. Essentially, parents are taking on the responsibility of "filling in the gaps" by providing supplementary aides to enhance their children's academics because the textbooks are subpar.

The next "Wicked Problem" Discussion will focus on poverty and health-care and be held on October 2 at 1:00 pm.

