President’s Update: The Value of Two Working Parents

There is no replacement for two working parents. Nearly 51 years of welfare policies created under the Great Society have torn African American families apart and perpetuated the cycle of poverty. We have proven that government policies cannot replace the family stability, economic opportunity and educational support that two earner households provide children.

The household income disparity between African Americans and whites currently sits at $30,306 compared to $63,488, respectively. Even more, the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) showed that African Americans in Minnesota remain unemployed longer than white Minnesotans, and are three times more likely to be living in poverty. Now, an unprecedented demographic shift and a looming workforce shortage have provided African Americans the opportunity to move into the economic mainstream and build a solid family structure.

Approved by the board of directors in January, Summit Academy’s new strategic plan is designed to take advantage of the demographic shift and position our students to enter the middle class. If we put two working parents in a household, each with starting wages of approximately $35,000 annually, we can create a household income of $60,000-70,000. Regular family-sustaining income provides the stability parents need to raise educated children—the future workforce.

New Strategic Direction to Support Students

Summit Academy’s newly adopted strategic plan is focused on increasing student success, diversifying vocational training offerings, growing our contextualized GED program and promoting personal stability. Students often face a multitude of barriers that hinder their ability to graduate and ultimately become self-sufficient.

This is particularly true for the individuals enrolled in the GED program, who are undereducated and unprepared to enter the workforce. Now that the doors to the middle class are open, our collective guidance and support is imperative. They cannot take advantage of this opportunity without a solid education, marketable skills and strong social networks.
Summit Academy has established a shared vision of student success and aligned our resources across departments to support this goal. Strategies include structured academic tutoring, assistance with housing, part-time employment opportunities and motivational incentives.

**Organizing for Success**

In conjunction with the strategic planning process, Summit Academy has made a few key organizational changes to prepare for success. Former Qwest CEO John Stanoch has joined our board of directors to take the lead on soliciting support for the *1,000 GED Campaign*. We have also hired Annie Nelson, formerly of Children's Theater Company, as Chief Advancement Officer. In her new role, Annie will provide strategic and operational leadership to Summit Academy, in addition to directly overseeing all development, marketing and communications initiatives.

Furthermore, Summit Academy also welcomes back Megan Normandin. Megan is returning in a new capacity as Director of Monitoring and Evaluation, where she will be responsible for monitoring data quality and for the ongoing evaluation of the organization’s programmatic results. These organizational changes ensure Summit Academy is well-positioned to implement new strategic priorities and the *1,000 GED Campaign*.

As we move into the execution phase of the *1,000 GED Campaign*, we have secured the support of U.S. Bank’s incoming CEO Andy Cecere to Co-Chair the campaign committee. We appreciate his leadership in this matter. With his and your continued support, we are confident that we will meet the post-welfare economy’s challenges and continue to prove that “the best social service program in the world is a job.” Between now and 2020—when the workforce growth will equal zero—Summit Academy intends to help transform African Americans and other communities of color into becoming self-sufficient members of tomorrow’s economy. Thank you for joining us!

-Louis King, President & CEO

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**Keisha Harris, 2016 GED Senior Care CNA/CHW Graduate, CNA, Firststat**

Keisha Harris, age 39 and a single parent of a 3-year-old, knew her career opportunities were limited since she didn’t have a high school diploma or GED, nor a vehicle to get to work.

In April of 2016, Keisha enrolled in Summit Academy OIC’s new contextualized GED Healthcare program. She worked hard and attended additional tutoring sessions to help her pass the GED test. “It was the math part of the GED test that kept giving me problems. I went to the tutoring so that I wouldn’t fail the test.” Keisha’s diligence paid off when on July 28 she successfully passed the GED test and transitioned into Summit Academy’s Senior Care CNA/CHW program.

Getting to class on time was a daily struggle for Keisha, “I didn’t have a car. I’d get up at 4:30 AM so that I could get my daughter ready, take her to daycare and then get to class on time. And this was every single day. I wasn’t missing any days. So when you are ready for something, you are going to commit to it no matter what,” said Keisha. Thirty weeks after starting at Summit Academy, Keisha graduated with certifications in both GED and Senior Care CNA/CHW. “I couldn’t pick up the phone without being asked to interview for a CNA job. I had 30 interviews! I actually had to turn down job offers. That was a big change for me. Before Summit, I had to beg employers for jobs. Afterward, I could pick and choose. That was a great feeling!”

Keisha now works as a CNA at Firststat earning $16-per-hour. "Earning my certificates gave me confidence in myself. I’m proud of them. I’ve hung them on the wall. I still can’t believe that I did it. Now I can tell my daughter, ‘look this is something that Mom did and I want you to know that there are no limits on what you can do.’"
Michelle McClellan, 2016 Medical Administrative Assistant Graduate
Allina Health, Patient Access Specialist

Michelle McClellan was looking for a career change when she saw Summit Academy’s billboard promoting the new 20-week no-cost Medical Administrative Assistant and dual Senior Care CNA/CHW programs. She wanted to create a more stable home for her family and stop living paycheck-to-paycheck.

According to Michelle, “My children were my motivation. I wanted to make a better world for them. Summit Academy was the opportunity to do what I wanted to do, so I went ahead with it.”

Determined to start a new career in the healthcare industry, Michelle treated each day of her Medical Administrative Assistant training as if it were a job interview. She also acted on an instructor’s advice to start applying for jobs as soon as possible, while she finished her training. As she entered her final training phase, she received numerous interview requests from both public and private medical facilities, including Allina Health.

“I applied to Allina before I went on Christmas break. They brought me in for an interview the day after Christmas, checked my references and then they offered me a job. They asked me to start on January 30, even though I had another week of school left.”

Because of Michelle’s hard work, solid grades and excellent attendance throughout the program, Summit Academy worked with Michelle to rearrange her final exam schedule to give her some flexibility. As a result, Michelle was able to start her new job on schedule as a Patient Access Specialist at Allina Health, while also completing her exams and final week of training at Summit Academy.

Deonte Lynn, 2016 Residential Carpentry Graduate
Carpenter, Keller Construction Services LLC.

For years, Deonte Lynn had worked dead-end jobs that barely paid enough to pay his bills, let alone his outstanding student loans. Looking for a fresh start, Deonte moved from Illinois to Minnesota. At the suggestion of Lonnie Morgan, a friend and Summit Academy alumnus, he enrolled in Summit Academy’s Residential Carpentry program.

“I chose Residential Carpentry so that I could get a hands-on experience on a real house. We’ve been working on the outside of the house doing door and window installation, siding and trim work. The first 10-weeks are mostly book work, just trying to memorize what everything is. But now in the hands-on phase, I know what everything is and how to use it. Summit Academy’s Residential Carpentry program was a life-changing opportunity for me. I can have a career now as well as a 5-year and even a 10-year goal.”
Ensuring Student Success

Starting in February of 2017, Summit Academy’s Support Services Team is taking action to ensure student success both inside and outside of the classroom. For many of our students, life barriers such as limited secondary education, unreliable transportation, hunger and unstable housing impact their ability to succeed at Summit Academy OIC.

We are piloting a housing support fund, which will allow Summit Academy to assist our students with rent, rental deposits and to explore long-term housing options. We have received some initial funds from the Target Foundation and other generous donors to get this initiative underway.

To address other barriers to success, our Support Services team is working individually with students to find solutions to alleviate some of these obstacles. For example, we provide students without a reliable means of transportation with discounted bus cards or assist them with MicroGrant funding opportunities to purchase their own vehicles. Summit Academy also provides assistance to students seeking to gain part-time employment.

We’ve also identified that many students do not have consistent meals and are often unable to afford even the reduced prices offered at the Summit Cafe, our in-house food service program. As a result, we are kicking off a new initiative, Food for Thought. This initiative provides students with a free meal at breakfast or lunchtime—in conjunction with an information session, soft-skills seminar or tutoring session. Summit Academy’s team of student advisors is structuring Food for Thought to include guest speakers that can connect students to the community resources available to help them achieve success.

Plans are underway to expand Summit Prep, our volunteer-based tutoring and test preparation program for prospective and current students. LaKisha Jones fills the brand new

Mark Deputie, Current Carpentry Student

Mark Deputie tried numerous times to earn a post-secondary degree or certification, but unforeseen life circumstances continued to force him to drop out. While between odd jobs in 2016, he decided to enroll in Summit Academy’s 20-week no-cost construction program.

When Mark didn’t initially pass Summit Academy’s Accuplacer entrance exam, he realized that he could take advantage of Summit Prep’s test preparation and tutoring sessions to prepare him to retake the exam and improve his score.

“I did the math and reading tutoring,” noted Mark. “The tutors helped me figure out stuff that I had forgotten because I’d been out of school for so long. Dr. Kemp, one of my tutors, walked me through the problems one step at a time until I reached the right answer. It felt real good when I finally passed that entrance test and got into the construction program.”

Mark is now in the final phase of Summit Academy’s pre-apprentice carpentry program and is scheduled to earn his Pre-Apprentice Construction certificate in April.

“Summit is helping me achieve my goal to become a carpenter and to create a better future for my family and me.”
We understand that our students are the center of everything we do at Summit Academy OIC. The Support Services Team will execute many initiatives to promote student success. Therefore, quality curriculum, resources & support, engaged staff and student preparation drive our programming and activities. As a staff, it is our greatest job satisfaction to see our students complete their education and training at Summit Academy, which then leads to awesome jobs and a new career for them.

-Charlotte Burgess, Director of Student Services

Summit Prep Program Coordinator position and plans to build a full team of 20 or more part-time volunteer tutors to meet our students’ growing needs. If you, or someone you know, are interested in becoming a volunteer tutor, please contact LaKisha at 612-278-5283 or volunteer@saoic.org. You can make a real impact by changing students’ lives forever—with a commitment to as little as an hour or two each week.

Incentives for Student Retention

Lastly, with the February GED cohort, Support Services kicked off new incentive program aimed at strengthening retention. Over the course of their first 10-weeks, students will have the opportunity to participate in a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators including: team-building activities, recognition certificates, gift cards, Summit Academy logo apparel and gear, and ultimately a free tablet when they acquire their GED certificate. “The new GED Incentive Program was developed to increase the retention rate in the GED Program. Our data indicates that, once GED students complete their 10-weeks foundation classes and transfer into their subsequent 20-week vocational training, they are very solid students. They’re prepared for the rigor of their classes and their retention rate is very high,” said Charlotte Burgess, Summit Academy Director of Student Services. “Our goal is to get more students, who start the Contextualized GED Program, through the entire 30-weeks. We want our students to know that we understand and support their career pathway. It is important to them, their families and the community.”

2016 Employee of the Year

Congratulations to Monica Jones on being selected as Summit Academy’s Employee of the Year! Monica joined the organization as its Retention Specialist in the summer of 2013, after graduating from Summit Academy’s Community Health Worker program.

Her colleagues noted that she is “. . . always willing to listen and provide sound advice.” Also, she is “. . . continually going above and beyond for our students to help them be successful inside and outside of class.”

Monica and 11 other deserving nominees were honored:

- Will Butler, Enrollment Manager
- Maria Cote, Director of Human Resources
- Julie Egan, Healthcare Instructor
- Jennifer Haavisto, Financial Aid Coordinator
- Beth Halverson, Construction Instructor
- Chris Hinton, Construction Training Manager
- LaKisha Jones, Summit Prep Program Coordinator
- Darlene Stuckey, Dining Services Manager
- Rev. Thomas Van Leer, Student Advisor Emeritus
- Bonnie Walker, Registrar
- Tracey Wilson, Program Assistant
Welcome LaKisha Jones – Summit Prep Program Coordinator

We are delighted to welcome our first Summit Prep Program Coordinator, LaKisha Jones. Prior to taking on this inspiring new role, LaKisha was supporting students, staff and visitors at Summit Academy’s front desk. Under LaKisha’s guidance, the Summit Prep tutoring and test preparation program plans to expand to include 20 or more part-time volunteer tutors, skilled in math or in reading and writing . . . or as LaKisha notes about tutor applicants, “simply having a passion for teaching others and a genuine interest in helping people.”

“Volunteers are crucial to our student’s success. They instill confidence and share knowledge. Whether they know it or not, they really are changing lives,” LaKisha states. “A lot of our students enter with low self-esteem, but with a real willing-to-try attitude. One particular student didn’t pass his entrance test but, by tutoring with Dr. Kemp for just a couple of hours, he doubled his score. The student was almost in tears because he made it into the February cohort. It’s invaluable when you see someone accomplish their educational goals and you know you are a part of that. These are people who are trying to really do something with their lives.”

If you are interested in sharing your talents at Summit Academy by becoming a part-time volunteer tutor, it only takes a couple of hours each week—and you’ll really change lives! Just contact LaKisha at 612-278-5283 or volunteer@saoic.org.