

PATRICK COUNTY EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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Press Release

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Virginia Secretary of Education Visits Patrick County

Virginia's Secretary of Education, Dr. Belle Wheelan, led a group of key Virginia education officials on Wednesday, April 13, on a brief visit to the Patrick County Education Foundation offices to receive reports on the organization's progress since 2001. Other officials included Peter Blake, Deputy Secretary of Education for Higher Education and the State Library; Suzette Denslow, Deputy Director of Policy for Legislation in Governor Warner's office; Tod Massa, Policy Research & Data Warehousing Director, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia.

The Foundation's Board Chairman, former Virginia Governor, Gerald L. Baliles and members of the Foundation staff provided information and reports on the highlights of the Foundation's three initiatives -- College Access, GED Promotion and Workforce Training. According to Baliles, "This was a rare and important opportunity for us to share with key education decision-makers of the Commonwealth what we consider to be a very compelling story about the education work going on in Patrick County with the County's school system and

the Foundation. The early successes have attracted the interest of the Commonwealth's top education leaders."

In addition to providing highlights of the Foundation's three programmatic initiatives, the Foundation staff also shared the "human side" of their work -- about the pride and excitement that is a part of GED graduation and the renewal of confidence that County adults have experienced upon completion of the Foundation's Workforce Training programs. "We wanted to demonstrate that there is an economic and personal value, too," Diane Edwards, the Foundation's Development Director, said.

The Secretary expressed delight to Foundation officials when she learned about the County's new program, "The Education Example," which is sponsored by the Foundation and through which Patrick County's elected officials have pledged to go "back to school" during 2005. The Secretary expressed her belief that Patrick's elected officials' commitment to return to school is quite unique and that she was unaware of anything like it in the nation, noting that "It certainly sends a strong message to all that education is a priority in Patrick County."

According to Gerald L. Hughes, Jr., Foundation Executive Director, the visiting officials were here to gather information on the Foundation's innovative approach to addressing issues of workforce preparedness and the attraction of new businesses to areas devastated by economic transformations of the past several years. Education officials in Virginia and regional education organizations recently have expressed interest in the possibilities of the Patrick County

Education Foundation's programs being replicated in other rural counties across Virginia and the South.

Hughes stressed to the State officials that the Foundation's model for an "education-driven economic development initiative" is certainly cost-effective. The visiting education leaders found that the Foundation's measures of its success since its founding -- a 112% increase in student financial aid, a 91% improvement in the percentage of seniors taking the SAT, a 189% increase in the projected number of GED graduates and the training of over 400 adults in critical job skills -- all provide significant affirmation that the Foundation's programs are working.

Hughes and Edwards noted how impressed the staff was with the Secretary's visit and her interest in Patrick's educational work. "Her enthusiasm was infectious," they said.

Hughes also provided information to State officials showing that since 2001 the Foundation has provided at no cost to County residents educational programs and services aimed at increasing the percentage of high school graduates who attend college and the number of adults with a high school diploma and improving the job-readiness of the County's workforce. Since 2001, the Foundation has helped high school seniors secure over \$2 million in college financial aid and provided \$258,750 in Last Dollar Scholarships. In addition, it has committed over \$49,000 in incentives to GED graduates and more than \$145,000 to fund innovative workforce training programs for County adults. Edwards pointed out to the visitors that the Patrick County Education Foundation is solely supported through the generous contributions of individuals, organizations and

corporations and through private and public grants. [For more information, call (276) 694-7233 or

visit the Foundation's website at www.patrickfoundation.net.]

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