

Yes We Can Baldwin County

COMMUNITY AGREEMENT

YES WE CAN

Better Schools. Better Baldwin. Better Together.



“What I learned is that we all have the same basic concerns and we all want to be heard.”

Baldwin County Education Coalition

YesWeCanBaldwinCounty@gmail.com

Phone **251.656.7333**

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Better Schools:

A Call to Action

EDUCATION MATTERS IN BALDWIN COUNTY

Close-knit communities with good schools at the center have long been a hallmark of life in Baldwin County.

The value we place on that tradition was most evident on March 23, 2010, when voters overwhelmingly approved a three-year, emergency sales tax for education. Despite tough economic times, we stood together and said, “Yes” to protecting our investment in quality teachers, programs and facilities.

But we also said “Yes” in the months that followed to joining forces for greater accountability, higher standards and more relevance in our public schools. What makes this new alliance so important for Baldwin County? Why must we keep the interest and energy of the Vote Yes campaign going?



- The severity and persistence of the state funding crisis make it clearer than ever that the future of education in our community depends upon our finding long-term, local solutions to Alabama’s antiquated tax system.
- With two-thirds of all jobs expected to require post-secondary degrees by 2018, the latest figures from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education indicate little more than half of Baldwin County’s graduates are currently enrolling in college or technical training programs after leaving high school.
- According to the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama, the poverty rate among Baldwin County schoolchildren has risen to 42 percent. At the same time, the Southern Education Foundation’s 2008 report – using new standards prescribed by No Child Left Behind – places Baldwin County’s dropout rate at 44.6 percent.

How will we confront these and other challenges facing education in Baldwin County? Clearly, our best hope lies in nurturing the grassroots movement that produced the historic March 23rd victory and partnering with school district leaders to seek substantive reform.

Better Baldwin:

A Strategy for Success



*“I want
to see
leadership
that can
bring our
entire
county
together.”*

Yes We Can Baldwin County is an initiative of the Baldwin County Education Coalition, an independent, non-profit, non-partisan citizens’ organization dedicated to:

- Creating a compelling vision for the future of our community and schools;
- Taking an outside-in approach to making quality education the central public concern for Baldwin County;
- Collecting the voices of citizens across the county to articulate common expectations;
- Providing the mechanism to ensure ongoing transparency and community involvement;
- Keeping the focus of our advocacy and policy work on children, not adults.

The Coalition – made up of representatives from the seven local enrichment foundations that together serve every Baldwin student – has chosen the **Yes We Can** model for public engagement to begin building civic capacity for the creation of a true 21st century education system. Developed by the Mobile Area Education Foundation (MAEF) in 2001, **Yes We Can** has since been used successfully in communities and schools across Alabama to raise standards and strengthen accountability.

In keeping with this proven process, the **Baldwin County Education Coalition** organized and conducted a total of **85 Yes We Can Community Conversations** in homes, churches and community centers throughout the county during July–October 2010. Altogether, more than **1300 Baldwin County citizens** sat together for an evening and talked about the future of our community and schools. Their comments were meticulously recorded by Coalition volunteers and the resulting data analyzed by MAEF as technical advisor to the project.

The citizens of Baldwin County can be proud of the scope, diversity and thoughtfulness of these discussions that have yielded broad consensus around major issues to be addressed – consensus that school leaders and policymakers can now rely upon to inform future decisions and actions.

The collective expectations detailed in this report provide a vision of the community we can become and a window on the kinds of schools we need to realize our dreams for our children.

Better Together:

A Lasting Partnership

“This is our
best chance
for real,
systemic
change.”

The **Yes We Can Community Agreement** is designed as a guiding document for creating a long-range plan of action in which the community can share ownership and responsibility. Upon acceptance by the Board of Education, a group of citizens will work hand-in-hand with school officials to create a **Co-owned Strategic Plan** that uses the themes identified in this **Community Agreement** as priorities for the system’s work.

At the same time, selected **Yes We Can** volunteers with expertise in these priority areas will pursue external improvements that only the private sector can accomplish. The district and community will have regular times each year to report progress to the community. And to ensure that accountability remains the touchstone of this work, **Yes We Can** will continue to inform and engage citizens around education reform.

Our goal is to speak with one cohesive voice about raising the bar in Baldwin County and partnering effectively to improve our children’s prospects for success.

Preamble

Here are the priorities generated by 1300+ Yes We Can participants representing every corner of Baldwin County – strategies for unifying our community by strengthening our public schools. These ideas are grounded in the notion that, as the ultimate beneficiaries of quality public education, citizens have a vested interest in ensuring that every student is prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century workplace and global economy. To achieve this, we must raise our expectations of ourselves and our schools and hold one another accountable to sustain the effort.

Part One

THE COMMUNITY WE WANT

- More jobs/higher paying jobs (that keep/attract graduates)
- A diverse, sustainable economy/smart growth/more support for local businesses
- Responsive, collaborative, visionary leadership
- Preservation of small town identity/quality of life/heritage



- All Baldwin communities working well together
- A comprehensive plan for growth and development (for all of Baldwin County)
- Efficient, proactive government
- All citizens respected and engaged
- A caring community that values, supports diversity
- Clean, protected environment
- Safe and drug-free
- Improved infrastructure and services (roads, sidewalks, public transportation)
- Quality healthcare
- More cultural and recreational opportunities/more awareness about these



THE SCHOOLS WE WANT

“If we truly want our schools to be ‘world class,’ we have to go find out what that is.”

- High expectations for all (students, teachers, administrators, parents, business/elected leaders and citizens)
- Funding that is stable, adequate and fair
- More transparency through effective use of data and communications
- Rigorous standards/challenging curriculum that meets individual student needs
- Community partnerships that support high achievement/college and career readiness
- More relevant and accessible career-technical education
- Equal access to courses, programs and services
- Excellent leadership
- Highly qualified, caring, effective teachers
- Higher graduation rate
- More technology and better use of it
- More meaningful parent involvement (input, training & support, accountability)
- More pre-K and readiness programs

- Smaller class sizes
- K-12 foreign language
- Safe, healthy, drug-free learning environment
- More electives
- Competitive national/top state ranking (i.e., focus on national standards)
- Comprehensive communications planning
- Informed, unified community support for education

Part Two

THE SITUATION WE FACE

“I have
to be part
of the
change.”

- Doing well with what we have
- Good facilities
- Proactive safety planning
- New district-level leadership
- Good parental and community support
- Widespread interest in expanding arts/cultural opportunities
- Unreliable, inadequate funding (to meet growth needs/ community expectations)
- Inconsistent reporting and use of data (i.e., lack of transparency)
- Disconnect between Baldwin communities
- Perceptions of inequity
- Too much focus on testing/not enough on individual student needs
- Not enough rigor or relevance
- Lack of comprehensive planning
- Apathy
- Complacency
- Resistance to change



WHY WE FACE THIS SITUATION

“We just don’t know what we don’t know.”



- Size of county/distance between communities
- Leadership at all levels
- “Silo-building”/competition for resources, programs
- Stereotyping and self-interests
- School board elected by districts
- Little understanding of one another’s issues/needs
- No shared, compelling vision
- Not enough parental responsibility/meaningful involvement (especially in middle/high school)
- Perception that we’re “good enough”/no sense of urgency
- Insular thinking (“We don’t know what we don’t know.”)
- Inefficiency/misplaced priorities
- Legal and policy constraints (including equity funding, state staffing requirements)
- Limited awareness/understanding of education issues
- Too few feel ownership for public schools

Part Three

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

- Develop/implement a comprehensive, co-owned strategic plan for excellence in education
- Communicate shared vision and monitor/report progress effectively
- Define roles for all stakeholders and ensure they have a voice in/accountability for ongoing school reform (parents, educators, support staff, students, businesses, elected leaders, faith community and citizens)
- Make all schools welcoming/responsive to students, parents, community

“Getting what I want for my child requires getting the best education possible for every child in Baldwin County.”

- See data as prescriptive, not punitive
- Audit and strengthen curriculum to improve access, rigor and relevance for all students
- Build relationships that support the classroom and foster community ownership
- Create an environment of openness and trust
- Listen and communicate for understanding, not just to inform (as part of comprehensive, co-owned communications plan)
- Build a greater value for education across Baldwin County
- Advocate for fundamental state-level reforms
- Take action/follow through on all commitments by district and community

WHAT CONDITIONS NEED TO EXIST

- Equal, shared concern for every child’s success
- Connected, engaged government, committed to education as a top priority
- Sustained expectations for improvement at all levels and by all parties
- Willingness by leaders to listen and respond
- More opportunities for business and other stakeholder groups to be continuously engaged and involved
- Creation of a global perspective/authentic “world-class” standards
- Better understanding of legal/budgetary constraints and day-to-day challenges in schools
- A permanent, citizen-driven mechanism for ongoing accountability and communication



HOW WE PLAN TO FULFILL OUR ASPIRATIONS

“I have
some real
hope for
the future.”

Priorities for Action

- › Funding to meet community expectations and priorities
- › Data-driven accountability
- › Leadership (at all levels)
- › Every student college or workforce ready
- › Communication to inform, engage and connect all citizens as shareholders of the public schools

Key Strategies

- Use the results of the **Yes We Can Community Conversations** (reflected in the Priorities for Action listed above) to undertake a long-term, grassroots effort to improve public education.
- Establish a **permanent, citizen-led mechanism** for ensuring the sustainability of the reforms identified and instituted as a result of the **Yes We Can Baldwin County** initiative.

Sustaining Partnerships

- Engage the following groups as active, committed partners in the fulfillment of this **Community Agreement** and in the ongoing work of **Yes We Can Baldwin County**:

DISTRICT AND LOCAL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND OTHER ELECTED OFFICIALS
EDUCATORS AT ALL LEVELS (PRE-K THROUGH COLLEGE)
SCHOOL STAFF
PARENTS AND PARENT ORGANIZATIONS
BUSINESS COMMUNITY
FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY
CIVIC AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
NEWS MEDIA

- Work to enlist every Baldwin County citizen as an advocate for effective public education.



YES WE CAN BALDWIN COUNTY LEADERSHIP TEAM

Co-chairs

Owen Bailey, Executive Vice President, Infirmiry Health Systems
Ramona Marsalis-Hill, Associate Provost, Spring Hill College
Donna Watts, President / CEO, South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce

North Baldwin

Ed Holland, VP/General Manager, Dental-EZ Group
Jan Paul, President, JP Services

Spanish Fort

Mike Robson, Shell Oil

Daphne

Jennifer Jenkins, President, JJ Public Relations
James (Bo) White, Fire Chief,
City of Daphne
Greg Strachan, President, Bryant Bank

Central Baldwin

Rev. Jeff Copeland, Pastor, First Baptist Church
Joey Shaw, Attorney, Loxley

Fairhope

Ken Cole, Resident Director, Merrill-Lynch
Cindy McBrearty, Community Volunteer

South Baldwin

Donna Givens, Senior Governmental and Community Affairs
Administrator, Baldwin EMC
Tom Knighten, Assistant Manager, Tanger Outlet

Gulf Shores / Orange Beach

Judy Newcomb, Baldwin County District Attorney
Jeff Silvers, City Council Member, City of Orange Beach

At-Large

Bob Higgins, Vice President,
Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance
Emily Martin, Dean of Instruction, Faulkner State Community College
Patty Hughston, Dean of Workforce Development,
Faulkner State Community College
Kim Neal, Publisher, *Baldwin County Living*

Ex-Officio

Dr. Alan Lee, Superintendent, Baldwin County Public Schools
Terry Willhite, Communications Director, Baldwin County Public Schools
John Hudson, UniServ Director, Baldwin County Education Association

BALDWIN COUNTY EDUCATION COALITION / YES WE CAN STEERING COMMITTEE

Alabama Gulf Coast Area Educational Foundation

Yolanda Devine Johnson,
Vice President

Central Baldwin Education Foundation

Brenda Pierce, Vice President

Fairhope Educational Enrichment Foundation

Diana Brewer, Executive Director
Miranda Schrubbe, Board Member

North Baldwin Coalition for Excellence in Education

Tina Covington, President

South Baldwin Chamber Foundation

Terry Burkle, Vice President

Spanish Fort Educational Enrichment Foundation

Sheren LeBlanc, Past President
Sandra Bostrom,
Executive Director

Supporting Educational Enrichment in Daphne's Schools

Ashley Hammond, President
Denise D'Oliveira,
Executive Director

*The mission of the **Baldwin County Education Coalition** is to engage community stakeholders in public education and to advocate with one voice for the success of every child in Baldwin County.*

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