

# **Mayors' Action Challenge for Children and Families**

## **Virginia Beach, Virginia**

### **Mayor William D. Sessoms, Jr.**

*As Mayor and as a first-time expectant granddad, I, like many citizens, have a passion for ensuring that Virginia Beach is an ideal place for future generations, a real "Community for a Lifetime." The best way to achieve this is through a community-wide approach to providing youth and families with accessible, affordable and sustainable opportunities that will improve their quality of life, help them recognize their strengths, increase their chances for achievement, and promote their development as happy and responsible citizens.*

*Is Virginia Beach up to this challenge? Absolutely! We are committed to quality education and the healthy development of our children, from pre-natal care to birth, and through the most formative years of childhood and into adulthood. It is with great enthusiasm and pride that Virginia Beach joins the Mayors' Action Challenge for Children and Families.*

## **Opportunities to Learn and Grow**

### **Local Goals and Targets:**

- By 2012, 90% of preschool children will be prepared to be successful in kindergarten as evidenced by Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) scores.
- Recognizing that the long range goal of the Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) is the successful preparation and graduation of every student, by 2015, 95 percent or more of VBCPS students will graduate having mastered the skills that they need to succeed as 21st century learners, workers and citizens. (*Compass to 2015: Strategic Plan for Student Success*)
- Each public school will improve achievement for all students while closing the gaps for identified student groups with particular focus on African American males. A key strategy is to expand the Extended Day Kindergarten (EDK) program. (*Compass to 2015: Strategic Plan for Student Success*)

- By 2012, all Title 1 schools in Virginia Beach will have the opportunity to receive financial assistance to attend arts educational programming at the Sandler Center for the Performing Arts.
- Increase the availability and affordability of cultural, recreational, historical and lifelong learning opportunities for all individuals to achieve self-reliance, personal fulfillment and workforce preparedness and advancement.

#### **Actions/Innovations:**

- **Virginia Beach GrowSmart (VB GrowSmart):** In 2009, by integrating several programs, the City created a new organization, VB GrowSmart, to focus and coordinate public and private services for prenatal to 5 year old children and their parents. The VB GrowSmart collaborative includes over 30 partners in education, health and human services, military, private industry and City departments.
- **Smart Beginnings Early Childhood Education Challenge grant:** In 2010, through VB GrowSmart, the City received a 5-year, \$500,000 grant from Smart Beginnings South Hampton Roads to address affordable, quality childcare; keep pregnant teens in school and learn parenting skills; and align curriculum and improve the kindergarten transition process for children, families and teachers. First year successes include partnering with the Regional Small Business Development Center to help eight child care centers create sustainable business plans and link them to Smart Beginnings' Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) and the creation of the Young Parents Task Force to enable young parents to stay in school and gain parenting skills.
- **VBparents.com website:** In 2009, the City launched a robust website to increase access to information and support services for parents and families. The VBparents.com website serves as an easily accessible clearinghouse for family friendly community events, parenting tips, and child development resources and receives over 1200 visits per month. For its work on VBparents.com, the City of Virginia Beach received a Pinnacle Award, the highest award granted by the Hampton Roads Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, for outstanding public relations work.
- **Every Child Ready to Read @ Your Library:** Virginia Beach Public Library pre-school storytimes are age-specific, based on Every Child Ready to Read® principles and designed to build the six early literacy skills children must have in place in order to be able to learn to read. Storytimes are a cumulative skill building series, using rhymes, reading, fingerplays, age-appropriate activities and parent education. Over 54,000 pre-schoolers and their parents attended the 2,640 pre-school age Library programs last year.
- **Square One:** Square One is a regional, public-private partnership focused on early care and education. Square One's mission is to help all children in Hampton Roads enter

school healthy and ready to succeed and ultimately, to provide the region and state with a competitive workforce in the global economy. Their services include providing professional development training to those who work with young children and their families. Square One is represented on the Virginia Beach GrowSmart team and we collaborate in putting together trainings for childcare providers – the most recent collaborative training 65 attendees. The City contributed \$53,798 to support the work of Square One in FY 2011.

- **Youth Opportunities Office (YOO):** Established in 1988 and funded by the City, this Office coordinates strategy and leverages resources to support positive youth development throughout the City. The Youth Opportunity Team hosts an annual Youth Forum on Public Policy and recently established an environmental action group called Project Green Teens.
- **Mayor’s Youth Leaders in Action (MYLA):** Middle and high school students contribute to the development of policy and promote youth service projects by serving with adults on the Public Library Board, Parks and Recreation Commission, Youth Opportunities Team, Citizens Working Group to Envision Transportation, Alternative Energy Committee and other groups. MYLA, with the Parks and Recreation Department, trained over 150 youth workers in the Advancing Youth Development Curriculum.
- **Princess Anne County Training School/ Union Kempsville Museum:** In June 2010, this African American museum highlighting the history of the segregated Princess Anne County Training school/ Union Kempsville High School and the importance the black community placed on education in the 1930’s was opened in the new state-of-the-art alternative high school. The museum provides the perfect context for discussions on the difficult topic of mid-twentieth century race relations and the emergence of the Civil Rights movement.
- **ACCESS the ARTS Program:** With education at the forefront of its mission, the Sandler Center for the Performing Arts presents education outreach opportunities, student matinees, workshops, and master classes geared towards school-aged children each year with the goal of reaching “every child, every grade, every year.” The Sandler Center Foundation also provides financial assistance to Title 1 schools in Virginia Beach through an innovative new program entitled ACCESS the ARTS, which allows underserved students to attend the education programs offered at the Sandler Center at no cost to the students or schools. The arts play a vital role in education, and the Sandler Center is proud to bring engaging, meaningful arts experiences to young people in our community with opportunities for students to experience their first theatre performance or work with world-class musicians.

- **City of Virginia Beach and Tidewater Community College Joint Use Library:** The City and TCC have partnered in the design, construction and operation of a 120,000 square foot, \$48M, LEED certified Joint Use Library, which will serve the faculty and students of Tidewater Community College and Virginia Beach citizens of all ages. The state-of-the-art library will open in the last quarter of 2012.
- **21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace Readiness Skills:** Opportunity, Inc., the regional workforce investment board, and Virginia Beach Public Schools partnered to develop new curriculum to teach Virginia's 13 Workplace Readiness Skills. Virginia Beach Public Schools' educators have incorporated the thirteen skills such as work ethic, positive attitude, problem solving, seeing the big picture, and self-presentation into the daily curriculum. The skills are then independently tested by the National Occupational Competency Testing Institute at the end of the school year. Students successfully passing the exam are issued a Workplace Readiness Skills certification which can become part of the student's portfolio and be used for seeking employment or entrance into post-secondary institutions.
- **Aquarium & Owl Creek District Plan:** Currently underway is the creation of a plan for the district surrounding the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center that will incorporate adjacent land and recreational facilities along General Booth Boulevard, Lake Rudee and its tributaries to encourage strategic development. As one of the City's cultural hubs, the district will increase the educational and recreational opportunities for children and families of residents and tourists alike.

## **A Safe Neighborhood to Call Home**

### **Local Goals and Targets:**

- Continue to create an environment where residents and visitors feel safe in our city through community partnerships, community policing, community trust and emergency preparedness. Virginia Beach has consistently been ranked the safest city of its size in the U.S. by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
- By 2011, the City will gain an in-depth understanding from at least 300 residents of in select neighborhoods of what is needed to help them feel safer in their homes. Police officers will conduct neighborhood surveys conducting door-to-door interviews of residents who live in neighborhoods requiring the greatest amount of police resources. This will assess their feelings of safety, strengthen connections between the police and these neighborhoods and help the City capture valuable information about what is needed to improve safety in these areas.
- Through the Emergency Response System, including federal, state and local public safety entities, City departments, Schools, the military, volunteer organizations, the faith

community, businesses, and higher education institutions, the City can respond to, mitigate and recover from emergencies in a timely manner with competent, well-prepared emergency providers.

- Define and implement a strategy to address the number of children running away from home each year by December 2011. The current estimate is between 2500 and 3000 children leave the safety of their homes on an annual basis. The challenge is to educate our community and stakeholders on the problems these children face and how to intervene to decrease the number of runaways.
- The City will initiate the Virginia Beach Military and Civilian Family Violence Prevention Council, under the Hampton Roads Military and Civilian Family Violence Prevention Council, to coordinate prevention, intervention, treatment and monitoring services between service providers in Virginia Beach by December 2011. The local initiative will include military leadership, City of Virginia Beach Police Department, the faith community, public and private human services agencies and the court system.

#### **Actions/ Innovations:**

- **Navigators:** This school-based violence prevention program offered at various elementary schools utilizes Second Step: A Violence Curriculum, a universal prevention program that proactively teaches critical social and emotional skills to children. The program focuses on reducing aggressive and disruptive behavior while promoting social and emotional competence. The program serves over 135 students each year.
- **Choices:** This research-based, after-school 10-session instructional program is designed to serve students who consistently demonstrate inappropriate behaviors, excluding truancy, that interfere with learning. The Choices curriculum provides students with information and activities to develop skills necessary to make appropriate choices and understand the impact of anti-social behavior on their lives and the lives of their families and communities. The program serves over 100 students and over 50 parents each month.
- **Families Together:** This program provides assistance to children, ages birth to 7 years, who are affected by parental substance abuse, intellectual disabilities or mental health concerns. Children are assessed to determine needed developmental, medical, psychiatric, social, educational and other support services. Case management provides assistance in developing a plan for services, referral, follow-ups and evaluations.
- **Project LINK:** This community-based program serves an average of 100 at-risk pregnant and parenting women each month whose lives have been affected by substance abuse. The program provides counseling and referral services, assistance with transportation and child care needs, case management, workshops, parenting groups and linkages to community resources.

- **Crisis Intervention Team Assessment Center at Virginia Psychiatric Center:** The Crisis Intervention Team is a partnership between the City's public safety departments and the Department of Human Services which has improved awareness, education and service delivery for individuals with mental illness. Police officers are trained to recognize symptoms of mental illness and respond appropriately. Rather than waiting with the individual for a mental health professional to arrive, the police officer can transport the individual to the Center where the CIT will assume responsibility until proper mental health services can be obtained.
- **Juvenile and Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI):** A collaborative program between the courts, city and non-profits, JDAI is funded by a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The philosophy is that children should be held in the least restrictive environment necessary to ensure public safety and placement should be consistent with their level of risk to the community. The average length of stay for predisposition cases in the Juvenile Detention Center has gone from 34 days (FY 2008) to 24 days (FY 2010), a reduction of 70%. The number of probation cases has decreased 57%, from 352 to 201. The number of parole cases has gone down from 92 to 77, an 83% decrease. Diversions (cases handled at the Intake level) have increased from 54 in FY 2008 to 654 in FY 2010. Youth being securely held for felonies have increased from 57.9% in FY 2008 to 79.5% in FY 2010. Cases are being carefully screened to identify low risk to high risk youth and basing interventions on the level of need. Staff works closely with the Police Department to move kids quickly through the system, from point of arrest to adjudication. Based on the program's specifics, Virginia Beach leads the state in detaining the "right" kids. As a part of this Mayors' Challenge, our goal is to continue to refine this program to facilitate identifying the alternatives to detention and providing services for high risk children.
- **Truancy Reduction Pilot Program:** For the past year, police in the City's 4<sup>th</sup> Precinct have methodically identified and targeted those students who are chronic truants. Officers meet individually with each student, the school counselor and the parents to determine the cause of the problem and develop customized, multi-disciplinary effort (human services, child care assistance, etc.) to address it. Formerly, truants had been charged, taken to court and sentenced. This effort keeps the students out of the judicial and penal systems, and gets them back to school – a far less expensive process for the community and one that addresses potential criminal problems down the road. The pilot's goal is to decrease the truancy rate in the 4<sup>th</sup> Precinct Pilot Program by 25%, and roll it out citywide by 2012.
- **Juvenile Fire Setters:** This is a Fire department program where children, found to be involved in a fire incident or have been referred to the City by a parent or other entity or

agency, are evaluated to be placed in one several programs, depending on the severity of the evaluation results. Last year, 17 sessions were held with 35 clients.

- **Fire Safety Programs for Pre-school and Elementary School Assemblies:** Through the Fire Department, younger age pre-school and elementary school children see stage productions about fire safety and water safety; productions include characters, clowns, puppets, and music. In the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Program, Life Safety Specialists go into EACH 4<sup>th</sup> grade classroom in Virginia Beach public elementary schools and teach fire safety; students have homework assignments and tests to show how well they are receiving the information; teachers are also asked to provide feedback via surveys. Over 29,396 children attended a fire safety program in 2009.

## **A Healthy Lifestyle and Environment**

### **Local Goals and Targets:**

- Curb childhood obesity and promote preventative health care, healthy eating and physical fitness by developing a comprehensive strategy to address these issues in alignment with the Virginia Beach City Public Schools' goal of Health Literacy, one of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills for Virginia Beach City Public School students. (*Compass to 2015: Strategic Plan for Student Success*)
- Virginia Beach will be recognized as one of the leading cities in America in demonstrating leadership for an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable future.
- Retain the rural character and natural environments in the southern part of the City, with guidance from the Comprehensive Plan and increase available land for passive and active recreational opportunities by 122 acres by 2012. (A total of 98 acres was procured in FY 2010)
- Preserve open space through the implementation of the Outdoors Plan, which is designed to preserve the natural habitats in Virginia Beach for families to enjoy, providing opportunities for environmental preservation, waterway access, active and passive recreational improvements and general enjoyment of the outdoors.
- Increase miles of multi-use trails and city roadway with bikeways by 10 miles by 2011.
- Provide children with experiences that increase environmental literacy – an understanding of the environment's influence on us and our influence on the environment – by fostering awareness of how the natural world works and concepts such as sustainability and how our choices impact the environment.

## **Actions/ Innovations:**

- **Strategic Growth Areas:** Strategic Growth Areas have been included in the City of Virginia Beach Comprehensive Plan and recently refined in the 2009 Comprehensive Plan. The Strategic Growth Area (SGA) Plans create a vision on how the City will grow in the future, The SGA Office will be the lead for implementation of the plans through working with citizens and developers, providing more detailed planning and design, develop land use regulations and guidelines which encourage walkable, sustainable communities and build supportive infrastructure. The City has identified Strategic Growth Areas to provide opportunities for continued physical and economic growth, help prevent urban sprawl, protect our established residential neighborhoods and rural areas from incompatible development due to growth pressures, maximize infrastructure efficiency and create unique and exciting urban spaces.
- **Williams Farm Community Center:** This 71,000 square foot community recreation center will include a gym, pool, meeting rooms, class rooms, fitness facilities, and administrative office space. The project also contains improvements to the adjacent community park including development of restroom/concession building, picnic shelters, 25,000 +/- sq. ft. skate park and supporting infrastructure of parking and pedestrian connectivity improvements. The project is planned to contain "green" initiatives, integrating water quality, site development and sustainable building practices meeting the LEED certification standard. The center will be located on City property known as Williams Farm Park located along Newtown Road which includes approximately 36 acres dedicated for recreation uses. The center would be part of a 90-acre uniquely comprehensive campus of recreational and learning community resources. The center is scheduled to open in September 2012.
- **Environmental Literacy:** The Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center, Parks and Recreation, Public Libraries and the First Landing State Park Interpretive Center developed and presented a series of monthly programs designed to introduce children to "backyard" science and nature, while weaving in personal, cultural and historical content. The program, entitled "The World Around You" was initiated at the Parks and Recreation Out-of-School Time Program at three elementary schools in Western Bayside.
- **Families and Schools Together (FAST):** FAST is a collaborative prevention program offered through the Department of Human Services at various elementary schools. The program uses the universal FAST curriculum and is designed to help children succeed in school and in life by strengthening important relationships in their lives. The program focuses on activities that strengthen family ties and build communication bonds with the family unit. The program served 174 children and 111 adults last year.

- **Virginia Beach Field House:** Opened in September 2010, the Field House is a 175,000 square feet indoor sports facility with six turf fields, twelve sport court surfaces, multiple party rooms, an arcade, an indoor “Fun Zone,” and a fully stocked food court. The City has entered into an agreement to utilize the Field House as a medically friendly shelter in an emergency. Over 100 young people are expected to participate in athletic team sports at the Field House in 2011.
- **JT Grommet Island’s Beach Park and Playground for EveryBODY:** JT’s Grommet Island Beach Park and Playground is 15,000-square-foot boundless and fully accessible park located between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Streets on the oceanfront. The first of its kind in the United States, Grommet Island Park was completely funded by donations and in-kind services valued at over \$1.6 million. The park includes a wheel-chair accessible deck with three perimeter landings that extend further out onto the beach so that EveryBODY can enjoy a day at the beach surrounded by their family and friends. The location, a favorite of area surfers, was also the inspiration behind the bronze “Anticipation” statue which was also dedicated to the City to memorialize the park. More than 9,000 individuals, families as well as private and non-profit businesses contributed to this very special project.
- **Bikeways and Trails Plan:** Updates to the Bikeways and Trails Plan are focused on evaluating current multi-modal access throughout the city, developing plans for additional routes to improve access to community assets and work sites and establishing policies and procedures to facilitate their inclusion and funding in transportation projects.

## **A Financially Fit Family in Which to Thrive**

### **Local Goals and Targets:**

- Connect 500 low-income families to mainstream financial institutions and help these families avoid foreclosure, avoid predatory lenders and stretch budgets in tough economic times, insuring they are “financially fit for the future” by 2015.
- Expand affordable housing opportunities available to people who become homeless. By 2013, the City will utilize awarded and allocated funding to provide medium or long-term housing assistance to 300 households to either prevent homelessness or house people who became homeless.
- Help insure that homeowners have the ability to afford to maintain their homes.
- Mobilize the community and the region to end homelessness.

## Actions/ Innovations:

- **Five Hundred Families Financially Fit for the Future (5F's):** In the last decade the number of families receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) services has more than doubled. There are currently 15,000 households (approximately 30,000 individuals, a large majority are children) in Virginia Beach receiving SNAP benefits. The 5F's program will identify 100 families per year who have not filed for the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit. The regional Internal Revenue Office (IRS) will partner with the City. A relationship between the City of Virginia Beach and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) will enroll the same 100 families with Bank-On Virginia Beach. The program will assist families who are either "unbanked" or "under-banked." The 5F's initiative will build on relationships with other local organizations such as Live\$mart, a group of community partners convened by the United Way of South Hampton Roads to collectively work together to achieve financial stability for the citizens. The Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Program will also partner to provide financial literacy training such as reducing debt, managing income and expenses, combating consumer fraud and credit management.
- **Smart Investing @ Your Library:** In 2010, FINRA Investor Education Foundation and the American Library Association awarded the Virginia Beach Public Library almost \$52,000 to provide local teens, age 12 to 18, with in-person and virtual financial literacy learning opportunities and resources. The grant is for a 24 month period beginning January, 2010 and ending January, 2012. The program, entitled, "Your Money for Your Life," will improve access to current library financial materials, expand the library's current collection of financial literacy information, provide materials at partners' facilities, offer online resources and learning opportunities and provide programs at libraries, schools and other partners' locations.
- **SHARE Network Access Points – SNAPs at every public library:** Opportunity Inc., in partnership with various faith based community organizations, sponsors SHARE Network Access Points, or "SNAPs", throughout the region to provide access to workforce services. An MOU signed with Opportunity Inc. in January 2010 ensures that all Virginia Beach Public Libraries serve as SNAP Centers. As such, Virginia Beach residents can now visit their local libraries for assistance with on-line job searches, referrals to the regional One-Stop Workforce Center, and other supportive services as needed. [http://www.opp-inc.org/workforce\\_centers](http://www.opp-inc.org/workforce_centers)
- **Home Repair Financial Assistance and Information:** The City will continue providing deferred non-interest loans to low and moderate income homeowners so that they can easily afford to maintain their homes, thus helping keep families financially fit and

better neighborhoods. The City will provide a central resource for all families to learn about how best to do home repairs and where to get affordable financing.

- **Youth Career Center of Hampton Roads:** The Youth Career Center of Hampton Roads is a center developed by Opportunity, Inc., the region's workforce investment board, that provides career services to the 14 to 21 year-old age group. Centrally located in Virginia Beach at one of its shopping malls, the career center will provide youth with Internet access and resources to explore career options, enhance workplace readiness skills, obtain assistance with education and training programs, and assistance in locating employment and volunteer opportunities. The center will be a partnership with area institutions of higher education, proprietary training schools, businesses, and the Virginia Beach City Public School System. Funded with public and private money, all services for the youth will be free. The center will be open Monday through Saturday from 10 AM to 7 PM.
- **BEACH (Bringing an End to All City Homelessness) Community Partnership:** The City helped create and is an active participant in this community partnership including citizens, non-profit, faith-based, business, and government organizations working together to develop resources, improve coordination and address gaps in services toward the goal of ending homelessness. In its first year, BEACH has raised over \$40,000 in funds from new donors and through new activities and is working to significantly increase that this year. Increased involvement of faith-based organizations in coordination of services and resource development is another goal for Year 2.
- **Regional Task Force on Ending Homelessness:** Virginia Beach is an active participant in the South Hampton Roads Regional Task Force on Ending Homelessness, which consists of seven municipalities: the Cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk and Virginia Beach; and Isle of Wight County. The primary goals of the Task Force are to create 120 new units of permanent, affordable housing opportunities for the homeless by 2013 and open A Healing Place, which would provide substance abuse recovery and housing for 150 formerly homeless people with substance abuse problems by 2015.