The Capital City Program (Richmond Alternative School) and Virginia Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC), a program of PEATC, are about to embark on a new and different model of parent engagement.

The school, located in one of Richmond’s most disadvantaged communities, serves students in middle and high school all of whom have one or more challenges and/or behavioral problems: potential dropouts, substance abuse, chronic truants, and persistent behavioral problems. The student body, which comes from schools throughout the Richmond Public School District, is traditionally at or near 100% eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the typical duration of a student’s attendance gives the school 180 days to perform a turnaround that can, and does, change the student’s life.

Yet here, at CCP, we are beginning to experience a turnaround directly attributable to parent engagement in its most powerful manifestation. Parents, initially unhappy to find their children assigned to an alternative program, are finding that, with their support and encouragement, their students are making amazing transformations both at home and in their scholastic achievements. Families, once frustrated and angry at the school board’s decision, now plead with the school administration to allow their children to stay past their allotted time.

Much of this success has been due to the vision and insight of the school’s newly appointed principal, Ms. Alberta Person, who, as Assistant Principal believed wholeheartedly in the power of combined parent and school efforts. Her solo endeavors have brought the school to the point where it is ready to rise to the next level. With this in mind, and at the suggestion of Richmond Public School Board member, Adria Graham Scott, Ms. Person contacted the Virginia PIRC and made arrangements to begin the Solid Foundation process. Solid Foundation is a tested, research based program developed by Academic Development Institute in Illinois, which follows a two year cycle of need assessment and parent satisfaction surveys, strategy and planning based on survey results by a School Improvement Team comprised of administration, faculty, community groups and PARENTS, and the implementation of the new school plan (followed by need and satisfaction survey, of course). This cycle of continuous action has been shown to evolve into a school environment in which parent involvement becomes institutional.

Starting this summer, V-PIRC, CCP and its parent group, along with a community action group called PLACE (Parent Leaders Advancing Children’s Education) have begun the survey and planning section of the Solid Foundation program, and both parent groups and faculty have high hopes that Richmond’s Alternative School will, in the process, break new ground.

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