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County holds education summit

Dec. 14, 2004
Nashiah Ahmad
Special to The Gazette

In an effort to understand the economic, political and community influences on Prince George's County education, county business and education leaders, legislators and officials met Saturday for a day-long meeting sponsored by the Prince George's Business-Education Alliance.

The summit, held at Prince George's Community College in Largo, provided a run-down of the various factors affecting the quality of education in kindergarten through 12th-grade.

"We really wanted to get a well-rounded picture," said David Merkwitz, executive director of the alliance. "If you're going to approach education in Prince George's County, you've got to look at all the factors." Economic development, the legislative outlook, state funding and the role of businesses are among the factors that need to be examined, he said.

The quality of public schools is key to attracting residents to the area, said Stephen Fuller, director of the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University's School of Public Policy.

"Public schools are the most important indication ... because good schools protect my investment in my house," he said.

Public safety is another key issue, he said. Participants discussed proposed legislation to be considered in January that would reintroduce an elected school board.

County schools CEO Andre Hornsby criticized the legislation. He called the move premature.

"When you go to an elected board there are not qualifications," besides minor qualifications such as age and residency, Hornsby said. "You're not going to get the same level of expertise."

State Sen. Paul Pinsky (D-Dist. 22) of University Park, acknowledged that this would be an issue. But he advocated a return to an elected board with members "who understand education, [and] who unfortunately have to understand a bit about politics."



Lawrence Jackson Jr./The Gazette

June White-Dillard, president of the Prince George's County chapter of the NAACP, talks with county schools CEO Andre Hornsby during a break at the Prince George's Business-Education Alliance-sponsored Business Education Summit Saturday at Prince George's Community College in Largo.

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Pinsky also spoke of the need to increase funding for school construction, which received \$285 million in 2002, but only \$180 million this year. He said there was also a need to attract and retain qualified teachers.

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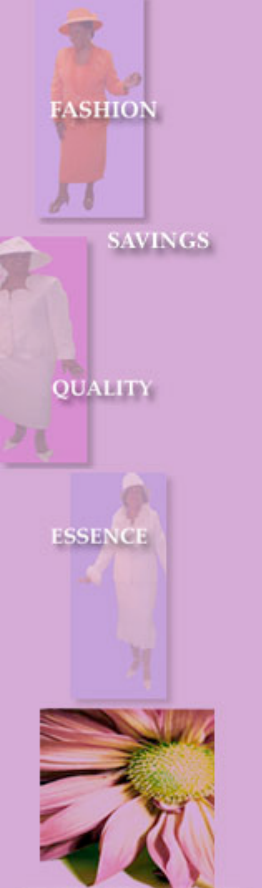
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