



## Success Equation Message Platform

*Uniting communities to reduce and prevent poverty so that all children can thrive.*

March 2014

### Background

The following message platform communicates the Success Equation's unique value and key benefits. It provides an overarching positioning statement for the Success Equation. Moving forward, all communications should be consistent in support of this message. The message platform, much like an elevator speech, does not need to be cast in stone or memorized. Rather, the core concepts and language should serve as a guide for messengers to embrace as they communicate about who the organization is and what it does.

Additional proof points are listed under several of the primary messages. They are intended to provide additional support for the key messages and should be included to the extent they are helpful. The message platform also provides the foundation for audience specific messages.

The message platform has four main points.

- **The Need:** This message point explains a problem or need that currently exists – the need that the Success Equation works to meet.
- **What We Are Doing:** This message point delineates what the Success Equation is doing to address the need or problem.
- **How We Do It:** This message point describes how the Success Equation works to address the need or problem, with specific actions or steps taken.
- **Vision:** This message point explains the end result of what the Success Equation's efforts will accomplish and how the need will be ultimately met.

## Message Platform

### THE NEED

No child chooses to be born into poverty. All children deserve to be well cared for, healthy, safe, and educated so they have opportunities for success now and in the future. Unfortunately, children in poverty usually experience poorer health, safety, and education, as well as greater levels of toxic stress, than children from families with more money. In Buncombe County, right now 1 in 4 children is living in poverty.

Children from low-income families are more likely to come to school behind, have undiagnosed learning disabilities, score lower on academic achievement tests, and drop out of school. They have less access to adequate health care and are 6 times as likely to live in homes without enough food, in high-crime neighborhoods.

Children from low-income families are also more likely to experience parental joblessness, substance abuse, homelessness, and/or absence of a parent – leading to toxic stress levels that brain research shows hardwires young children’s brains and slows cognitive and emotional development.

[Include one or more of the following stories/factoids as appropriate:]

#### Overall indicators:

- 1 in 4 children live in poverty in Buncombe County (24%)<sup>1</sup>
- 523 schoolchildren are classified as homeless in Asheville and Buncombe County. That is enough children to fill an entire local elementary school<sup>2</sup>

#### Early Childhood Development:

- Visits with pregnant and parenting clients average about 200 visits/month through the Nurse Home Partnership
- The assigned WIC caseload for Buncombe County is 5387:  
January 2013 Data:  
Pregnant Women – 592  
Breastfed Infants – 452  
Formula Fed Infants – 270  
Children ( age 1 to 5 ) – 2670

#### Family Supports:

- 54% of Asheville City and Buncombe County students are on free and reduced lunch.<sup>3</sup>
- 20,810 Buncombe County families are on food assistance<sup>4</sup>

#### Economic Stability

- 7.9% (10,027) of Buncombe County Residents are unemployed<sup>5</sup>
- Renters are cost burdened when housing costs exceed 30% of their household income. A single parent would have to work 82 hours a week at minimum wage in order to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment in Asheville.

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<sup>1</sup> The Data Center: Kids Count

<sup>2</sup> ACS & BCS data

<sup>3</sup> Asheville City Schools and Buncombe County Schools data

<sup>4</sup> Buncombe County Health and Human Services

<sup>5</sup> North Carolina Department of Commerce - Labor and Economic Analysis Division

- There are two main programs that address child hunger: the free and reduced lunch program at schools and the SNAP (a.k.a food stamps) program for families. There are about 16,000 children in Buncombe County served by each program. That is enough children to fill 296 school busses that would line up end to end from the County Courthouse to the Asheville Mall<sup>6</sup>

Child poverty impacts all of us because today's children are tomorrow's teachers, doctors, policymakers, and parents.

The child poverty crisis is fixable. Some communities have shown great success at reducing their child poverty rates, but only when communities and individuals have united to make it a priority.

### **Tailored Messages**

Here is where you can share your tailored messaging sample messages and we can all help to make them as effective as possible. Each message should have three talking points and an explanation as to why they connect back to poverty.

**Health:** "Poverty can result in an increased risk of mortality, prevalence of medical conditions and disease incidence, depression, intimate partner violence, and poor health behaviors. A 1990 study found that if poverty were considered a cause of death in the US, it would rank among the top 10 causes.[1] While negative health effects resulting from poverty are present at all ages, children in poverty experience greater morbidity and mortality than adults due to increased risk of accidental injury and lack of health care access.[2,3] Children's risk of poor health and premature mortality may also be increased due to the poor educational achievement associated with poverty."

<http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app#/north-carolina/2013/measure/factors/24/description>

**Economic Development:** Local businesses need educated, reliable, and engaged employees to be successful. Good paying jobs ensure that working parents can meet their families basic needs and reduce reliance on public assistance. However, Buncombe County's poor families and children are often caught in a cycle of lowered educational achievement, higher levels of chronic stress (often related to meeting basic needs like food, medical access, and housing), and geographic isolation. Economic development should strengthen the community that businesses call home by expanding educational/vocation training for youth in poverty, increasing access to transportation and housing close to jobs, and ensuring school readiness and success for children in poverty. Together, we can build a strong, well educated, and enfranchised workforce.

**Education:** Poverty has a particularly adverse effect on the academic outcomes of children, especially during early childhood. (APA) American Psychological Association

- Chronic stress associated with living in poverty has been shown to adversely affect children's concentration and memory which may impact their ability to learn. (APA)

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<sup>6</sup> ACS and BCS data per their communications teams, and Rob Morrell, Buncombe County Human Services Support Team.

- Children living in poverty have a higher rate of absenteeism or may leave school all together because they are more likely to have to work or care for family members. (Alliance for Excellent Education)
- Inadequate education contributes to the cycle of poverty by making it more difficult for low-income children to lift themselves and future generations out of poverty. (APA)
- In Buncombe County, approximately 56% of all students received free or reduced cost meals because their families' low income qualifies them for federal assistance. In some elementary schools, as many as 80-90% of students in the school receive free/reduced price meals.

**Faith:** Children First's Success Equation is the next step in loving our neighbor as ourselves. It gives us concrete steps to put love into action alongside other committed groups and individuals in the community. Our faith teaches that our neighbor's well-being is essential to our own and advocating for the poor as well as giving money are at the heart of the Christian tradition.

**Women's Empowerment:** Approximately 75% of households in our local public housing neighborhoods are headed by single mothers. Women are the backbone of communities experiencing poverty. It is typically their responsibility to ensure that most households and the next generation in their care have their basic needs met. Unfortunately, without adequate supports and opportunities for these women, the cycle of intergenerational poverty continues.

## WHAT WE DO AS A MOVEMENT

The Success Equation is a local movement that unites the community to reduce the incidence of poverty and its impact on children in Buncombe County, resulting in an environment where all children can thrive.

The Success Equation does this in Buncombe County through the following roles:

- **Educator** – reporting poverty data, messaging about poverty's causes and its impact, what has effectively reduced child poverty in other communities, and inspiring broader dialogue focused on solutions.
- **Advocate** – building a local advocacy voice supportive of public policy and investment in effective changes in our community that meet children's basic needs and place them on a path to success.
- **Convener** – connecting individuals, businesses, government, schools, faith communities, and organizations to enhance promising strategies, collaborations, and creative/provocative ideas.

Success starts with where we live, work, learn, and play. The Success Equation brings the community together to support children so that they can live happy, safe, and productive lives.

[Emphasize one or more of the following points as appropriate:]

- **History:** In 2010, Children First/CIS launched a listening project to document the experience of families facing poverty in Buncombe County. 113 low-income people, including teen and Latina mothers, participated in focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Additionally, we interviewed service providers that work with low-income families. Interview participants represented a wide geographic range: from public housing in the city, the Emma community, south Asheville, east Asheville, and Barnardsville. Children First/CIS presented the issues raised by the listening session to a broader community summit for action ideas. In May 2011, Children First/CIS hosted a two-day appreciative inquiry summit attended by 120 participants representing local organizations, community leaders, low-income individuals and interested community members. Out of this summit, an Action Plan was created and committees formed.
  
- **Partners:** Success Equation partners participate on one or more of our four working teams, and guide the strategy and work. The Success Equation is in the process of formalizing its organizational partnership structure. Current partners include:
  - Asheville City Schools
  - Asheville GO
  - Buncombe County Schools
  - Children First/ Communities In Schools of Buncombe County
  - DHHS
  - Episcopal Diocese
  - Food Policy Council
  - Innovation Partners
  - Junior League of Asheville
  - Just Economics
  - Pisgah Legal Services
  - Searchlight Consulting
  - Smart Start
  - Women's Wellbeing & Development Fund
  - YWCA
  
- **Structure:** The Success Equation is currently composed of 4 working teams: Leadership, Communications, Policy, and Family Resource Center.
  - **The Leadership Team** meets quarterly to assess the progress of the Action Plan, facilitate cross-team sharing, make strategic recommendations for the initiative, and serve as ambassadors for the initiative to the community.
  - **The Communications Team** helps create broad messaging for the Success Equation and interface with the other teams to provide specific messaging for policy, volunteer opportunities, and frontline initiatives.
  - **The Policy Team** has three task forces: Transportation, Early Education/Child Care, and Housing
  - **The Family Resource Center Team** helps shape the Family Resource Center Roundtable to meet three objectives: networking/sharing; focus on best practices & evidenced-based programs; and shared evaluation and messaging to attract resources. The roundtable is comprised of members from existing or emerging family resource centers – including school-based initiatives – in Buncombe County.

- **Relationship with CF/CIS:** The Success Equation currently operates under the umbrella of Children First/ Communities In Schools. CF/CIS raises funds to support the effort, and CF/CIS staff provide organizational and administrative support to the Success Equation teams.
- **Funding:** Children First/ Communities In Schools raises funds to support the operation of the Success Equation. It is funded in part by individuals, civic & faith groups, the United Way, Z Smith Reynolds, and Women for Women.

## HOW WE DO IT

Reversing the status quo requires changes in public awareness and understanding; changes in laws, programs and budget priorities; and changes in how communities support all children. We all have an opportunity and responsibility to reverse the unfair disadvantages poverty places on children.

The Success Equation educates, advocates, and convenes in three priority areas – Early Childhood Care & Learning, Family Supports, and Economic Stability & Asset Building.

[The following example points should be kept current – use as appropriate:]

- **Early childhood care and learning:**
  - The 2012 Child Watch Tour prioritized the need for early childhood education because it prepares young children for later success and child care vouchers help working families. About 80 community leaders spent a half day learning more about quality centers in Asheville and the need for increased access for low-income children. As a result, 60 people sent letters to our legislature asking them to increase child care subsidy funding.
- **Family supports:**
  - Improvements to Department of Social Services intake and eligibility process. DSS staff has listened to many of the suggestions to make application and certification less time consuming and more convenient for families. They've made many adjustments to make the process more efficient and accessible.
  - A new family resource center in the Hillcrest Community. A common theme from last year's summit was making resources available in local communities. Residents in Hillcrest have worked with the Women's Wellbeing and Development Foundation to realize that vision. The new center is providing education/training workshops, computer access, a lending library, referral services, and emergency assistance to the community.
- **Economic stability and asset building:**
  - Living wage campaign for Buncombe County employees and contractors. Promoting jobs that pay enough to support a family is part of the Success Equation. This summer Just Economics has asked the county

commissioners to make sure that all county employees and contractors are paid a living wage.

## **VISION**

Our **mission** is to inspire and sustain a local movement to reduce the incidence of poverty and its impact on children in Buncombe County through education, collaboration, and public policy. Our **vision** is a community where all children can thrive.

**BOILERPLATE TEXT:** *The Success Equation, under the umbrella of Children First/CIS, unites community partners to reduce the incidence of poverty and its impact on children in Buncombe County through education, collaboration, and public policy, resulting in an environment where all children can thrive.*

*Partners include the Cathedral of All Souls, Girl Scouts Peak to Piedmont, Junior League of Asheville, Just Economics, Innovative Partners International, Searchlight Consulting, Women's Wellbeing and Development Foundation, and YWCA. To find out more go to [www.childrenfirstcisbc.org/SuccessEquation](http://www.childrenfirstcisbc.org/SuccessEquation)*