



MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor and City Council
From: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
Date: March 11, 2010
Subject: Bidwell Training Program

The City of Austin has recently been presented with an opportunity to partner with AISD, Travis County and Dell Corporation to conduct a feasibility study for a dynamic program that would provide educational opportunities and job training to youth and adults in our community.

When I first arrived as City Manager, it was easy to notice the prosperity Austin had experienced over the years. However, like many cities, there was and still remains a void of opportunity for many of our unskilled adult workers and at-risk youth. At the time, I was only somewhat familiar with the work being done by William E. Strickland, Jr. to address similar issues in Pittsburgh, but was interested in his program and attended a presentation of his in Boston. At this presentation, I was enlightened and my interests reaffirmed. Through his examples of once-desperate single mothers regaining a sense of pride after becoming productive workers to young children migrating from the streets to an afterschool art class, Mr. Strickland gave way to a truly inspirational cause. Mostly, I was inspired by the thought that through collaboration and partnership, we could duplicate the program in Austin and provide our community with an invaluable opportunity. It was also at this presentation that I learned Dell Corporation was interested in Mr. Strickland's program and that they were planning to bring Mr. Strickland to Austin for a meeting. I took the opportunity to coordinate other governmental officials to attend this meeting as well.

On Monday, December 7, 2009, the Austin Community Foundation and Tim Mattox of the Dell Corporation hosted a community meeting to introduce a successful trade/arts program developed by William E. Strickland, Jr., to serve disadvantaged youth and unemployed adults in Mr. Strickland's Pittsburgh neighborhood. In attendance at this meeting were Board Trustee Cheryl Bradley, County Judge Sam Biscoe, Mayor Leffingwell, Council Member Cole, representatives from the offices of Council Members Spelman and Riley, and myself.

Strickland is author of the book, *"Make the Impossible Possible"*, about how his life was turned around by a high school art teacher, leading to an art scholarship at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1972, Strickland transformed a failed vocational center in his home neighborhood into a

center that provides after-school art classes (ceramics, digital media, sculpture, etc.) for high school students and vocational education for adults who may or may not have finished school. The Bidwell's Center model specializes in addressing the training needs of the Pittsburgh community. Currently, the program is preparing adults as "pharmaceutical techs", "chemistry techs", gourmet cooks, and photographers. Approximately 200 vocational/academic students attend classes from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. daily.

In addition, 500 public school students, ages 13-17, attend an after-school arts program, where they receive five hours of arts instruction per week. Strickland believes that the arts are crucial to unlocking the students' imaginations, which he says is necessary to unlocking their potential. He said this program has data to show that parent engagement is high, dropout rates and absenteeism are down, and graduation rates are up.

To date, the Bidwell Training Center Program has been replicated in Grand Rapids, Cincinnati and San Francisco. Plans are under way to replicate the program model in such communities as Boston, Charleston, Columbus and Minneapolis as well as abroad in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Israel. The \$15 million center in Pittsburgh was built with significant help from the Hienz Corporation, and a large part of its operating budget is provided through state Vocational Education funds.

The Dell Corporation will provide half the \$150,000 budget for a planning grant if the Austin Community matches that amount. AISD and Travis County have agreed to provide \$25,000 each to the feasibility study. I have authorized \$25,000 from the City of Austin and expressed our commitment to perform the role of *Convener*, responsible for coordinating the study with the Bidwell Corporation. The 6-8 month planning process would determine the feasibility of replicating the program in Austin.

I am very optimistic that the success of the Bidwell Training Program can be replicated here in Austin. We are in the process of completing the initial required documentation for the study and anticipate the study beginning shortly after all documentation has been submitted. Prior to study implementation, I will provide you with a more detailed briefing of the program.

Please contact me or ACM McDonald if you have any questions.

c.c. Assistant City Managers