

# Investing in the Future with The Center for a New Generation

By: Stephen Long

**Birmingham**, Alabama (November 7th, 2014)- The bell rings at 3:00 at Hayes K-8 Elementary School and the students pack up their supplies and rush out of their classrooms. But just because they're leaving class doesn't mean that the day is done. In fact once school's out, the day is just beginning for many of these students. After 3:00, The Center for a New Generation is in session. After school CNG students can be found receiving one on one homework assistance, participating in dance classes or using computers to learn about science.



**Figure 1:** Students using computer programs that help with academics at CNG.

The Center for a New Generation is the first in the state of Alabama. The program was founded by Birmingham native and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in East Palo Alto, California in 1991. The Center for a New Generation later partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of America and has since been established in schools across The United States. The result of a partnership between Birmingham city schools and The A.G. Gaston Boys and Girls Club, The Center for a New Generation at Hayes K-8 Elementary offers a unique learning

program that targets low income students in Birmingham city schools who do not have access to educational enrichment opportunities outside of school. The Center for a New Generation (CNG) is committed to serving its students by providing an environment to its students that is engaging and educational and students have a good time participating. In an interview with AL.com, The A.G. Gaston Boys and Girls Club President Frank Adams stated, "These are kids who, but for a lack of financial resources, don't get that summer or after-school enrichment activities a lot of kids get, so this bridges that gap. So they're getting the academic piece as well as the arts and enrichment."



**Figure 2:** UAB volunteer Brandon Hatcher observes students learning how to play recorders at CNG.

Brandon Hatcher is a UAB student who regularly volunteers at CNG. Sporting a UAB class of 2015 shirt and a big smile, his enthusiasm was infectious, "We offer students a variety of classes to take such as: violin, recorder, band, choir, drama, creative writing, dance, fitness, drumming, inventors club, science explorers and computer classes." Hatcher explained. "We are still

forming community partnerships and there are a variety of new opportunities that are arising. Amazing things are happening!"

The variety of educational opportunities these students receive is unmatched. CNG also offers sports, field trips and other special activities. As an extension of the A.G. Gaston Boys and Girls Club, CNG programs share AGGBGC's focus on academic success, character, leadership and healthy lifestyles.

Academically, students are placed in hands-on environments that provide informal situations where students are taught science, technology, engineering and math. By placing students in these informal and engaging environments, students become eager to learn about these subjects. CNG also places heavy emphasis on teaching students about arts. Through CNG's visual and performance based learning programs, students develop social, cognitive and personal competencies. Tyrenda Reed-Williams, the AGGBGC Director of Outreach claims, "By focusing on these enrichment opportunities, we hope to increase the learning opportunities that these children would not receive otherwise"



**Figure 3: Students actively participating during a CNG program.**

To serve CNG students, The A.G. Gaston Boys and Girls Club hires successful,

credentialed teachers and other respected professionals to lead its programs. Director Mark Farris came to Birmingham from Atlanta, where he was a coordinator at the Jewish Family and Career Services. CNG also utilizes students from local colleges, such as Miles College and The University of Alabama at Birmingham, to serve as assistants. These volunteers serve as instructional aides and mentors. The goal is to keep classroom student-teacher ratios at 12:1 to make sure that all students receive the attention they require for a nurturing environment.

Brandon Hatcher has witnessed the success of the program while volunteering. "One of the most amazing things that I have seen happen has been the visible development that has been made in our student's communication and citizenship skills." Hatcher proudly stated. "We had a few students that we were worried about because of the behavioral and academic issues they were demonstrating at such a young age. Because of CNG, their academic confidence has skyrocketed and their behavior has drastically improved." Hatcher is not alone in his opinion on the organization's success. Martez Files, a fellow volunteer with a big heart spoke about the success of the program. "CNG stresses the importance of building relationships with our students. We try to build trust with students by encouraging and building trust with them." Martez says. "Most of the time, if a kid acts up in school they get punished immediately. CNG allows us to get to the real root of the problem and connect with the student, rather than just punishing them. That builds a sense of trust between ourselves and our students."

The volunteers are not alone in their positive outlook of the program. The children that participate and their families are also fans of The Center for a New Generation. Third grader Miles Morales spoke about his

experience at CNG with a big smile, flashing a toothless grin. "Coming here after school is my favorite part of the day!" Morales exclaimed.



**Figure 4: Mentors working directly with students at CNG.**

Even though the program is relatively new, volunteers and teachers see a positive impact on the students who attend. Not only is the program having a positive impact on the students but the teachers and volunteers also experience the benefits of CNG. "One of the major aspects that I think everyone that is involved with CNG would agree on is that we all learn just as much from our students as they learn from us." Hatcher says. "Some of our students may be lagging behind academically and socially, but they are the most wonderful students I have ever had the honor of working with." Hatcher makes it apparent that coming to CNG is the highlight of his day.

As part of the A.G. Gaston Boys and Girls Club's "Building a Better Future" campaign, the organization hopes to establish three new CNG locations in Birmingham by May 2015. To accomplish this goal, The A.G. Gaston Boys and Girls Club has been reaching out to local students to volunteer with CNG. According to Hatcher, the idea of a new CNG is circulating among other Birmingham city schools, "Word is getting around to other schools about how

wonderful CNG is and I believe some may even be a little envious! We have consistently high attendance and we get applications every day for students to join. Personally I can't think of a better place for students to be!"

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