

Addressing educational hurdles first step to eradicating poverty

Written by Harry Colbert, Jr.
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According to the Greater Twin Cities United Way, more than 600,000 people in this region are living in poverty.

With numbers such as this so dire, area civic and business leaders have expressed a sense of urgency to address the issue and implement solutions that will drive that number down. To that effort, several leaders met with the newly minted U.S. president of the United Way Worldwide, Stacey Stewart. Stewart, who is the first to hold the organizational post of U.S. president, was in town this past week meeting with area leaders. The United Way U.S. president said to eradicate poverty; the first step is to address educational hurdles facing the nation's poor.

"In Washington, D.C., 40 percent of the adult population can barely read," said Stewart who was the chief diversity officer and vice president for the office of community and charitable giving for the federal home lending giant, Fannie Mae. "It occurred to me that if I wanted to fix the housing problem, I had to start earlier and fix the education problem."

Stewart said one of the top goals within the United Way is to assist in improving the nation's high school graduation rate, which current sits at 78 percent according to Stewart. She said that number is about 20 percent lower for students of color.

"If we are serious about improving these numbers, we have to be better about working with communities of color," said Stewart, who said the goal is to have a national graduation rate of 90 percent.

With the Twin Cities schools having some of the worst achievement gaps in the nation, Stewart said solutions lie in our own backyard.

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