“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead
The David Mathews Center
for Civic Life

- **Mission:**
  - The Mathews Center is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan, tax-exempt corporation that works to foster infrastructure, habits, and capacities for more effective civic engagement and innovative decision making.
  - The Center is named in honor of Dr. David Mathews. Dr. Mathews is a Grove Hill native; former president of the University of Alabama; former Secretary of Health Education and Welfare; and currently president and CEO of the Kettering Foundation.

- **Signature Programs:**
  - Citizens’ Congress
  - Alabama Issues Forums
  - Coaching Community Innovation Workshops
  - NIF in the Classroom Teachers’ Institute
  - Jean O’Connor-Snyder Student Community Research Internship
Seven Democratic Practices/Tasks

- Creating public space in which citizens can do their work
- Naming problems in terms held valuable by citizens
- Framing issues for making deliberative choices
- Deliberating openly together to make choices that create common ground for complementary action
- Securing commitments to act together
- Acting publicly
- Turning evaluation into civic learning
### Debate, Deliberation, and Dialogue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>debate</th>
<th>Deliberation</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compete</td>
<td>Complement</td>
<td>Explore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuade</td>
<td>Engage</td>
<td>Engage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dig-In</td>
<td>Reach Across</td>
<td>Reach Out</td>
</tr>
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<td>Clarify</td>
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<td>Tightly Structure</td>
<td>Semi-Structured</td>
<td>Loosely Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually Quick</td>
<td>Usually Slow</td>
<td>Usually Slow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partisan Victory</td>
<td>Public Knowledge</td>
<td>Private Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Citizens’ Congress – June 23, 2010

170 Alabama citizens came together at the American Village to discuss the state’s dropout situation. Using these conversations, the Mathews Center developed an issue guide containing three approaches to addressing dropouts in Alabama.
Three Approaches to the Dropout Situation

• Approach One: Emphasize Achievement
  – School-based approach that emphasizes the need to focus on high-achieving students

• Approach Two: Emphasize Preventative and Corrective School Programs
  – School-based approach that encourages educators and administrators to further individualize educational opportunities for students

• Approach Three: Emphasize Community Responsibility
  – Community-based approach that focuses on identifying resources in the community that can help address the issue
AIF Conveners

Northeast Alabama Community Foundation
Bibb County Adult & Youth Leadership
Walker County Cooperative Extension
Elmore & Staton Correctional Facilities
Wilcox County Cooperative Extension
Alabama State Council on the Arts
Coffee County Youth Leadership
Decatur Quality Education
University of Montevallo (SGA)
Phenix City Chamber of Commerce
Valley High School

Fort Payne Career Center
Lowndes County Cooperative Extension
Teachers’ Institute (Montevallo)
Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church
Alabama Poverty Project
Stillman College
Wiregrass Foundation
Town of Oak Grove
University of Alabama
Blount County Education Foundation
Birmingham Issues Forums
Community Decision Making on the Dropout Situation

- Community guidance counselors
- Youth mentoring programs
- GED courses in local prisons
- Community awareness campaigns
- Neighborhood dinners for children
- Drop-back-in academies

- Community centers
- School volunteers
- Parenting courses
- Community resource guides
- Community career coaches
- Positive role model presenters
“Making Community Decisions About Alabama’s Dropout Situation”
Making Community Decisions About Alabama’s Dropout Situation (CCI)

- On June 22, 2011, the Mathews Center invited seventeen community groups from across the state of Alabama to participate in a large-scale learning exchange at Auburn University Montgomery.
- Event participants interacted with the groups on a rotating basis.
- The activity was designed to increase networking opportunities for engaged citizens – specifically, participants were encouraged to think through next step efforts related to dropout prevention in their communities.
- Coaching community innovation workshops are designed to foster capacity building measures.
- Other examples include facilitator training workshops and convener development workshops.
National Issues Forums in the Classroom - Teachers’ Institute

Middle and high school social science teachers from across the state participated in the 3rd Annual Teachers’ Institute in October 2010 at the American Village in Montevallo, AL.
National Issues Forums in the Classroom - Teachers’ Institute

- Connect democratic practices and public deliberation to Alabama Social Studies Course of Study Standards – primarily using NIF materials and Mathews Center resources
- Introduce capacity building measures and democratic practices at an early age
- Connect classroom learning with citizen responsibilities
- Develop resources (i.e. lesson plans and rubrics) that encourage students to approach citizenship and public decision making in an active manner
- Support from the Alabama State Department of Education has lead to significant growth with this particular program
Harry Boyte and Elizabeth Hollander on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University

- “The challenges facing higher education go beyond the need to add more service-learning experiences or to reward faculty for community-oriented research. As important as these objectives are, the more fundamental task is to renew our great mission as the agents of democracy. This task points to deep strategic challenges: how to tap and free the powers and talents of all elements of our schools—our faculty, our students, our staff, our administrators—for public engagement? How to break down the artificial and arbitrary ‘silo cultures’ that now stifle creativity, connection, and community? How to renew throughout our institutional life and cultures a robust sense that our work contributes to the commonwealth of our communities, our nation and the world?”

(excerpt from “A Widespread Declaration: Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University”)
Jean O’Connor-Snyder Community-Based Research Internship

- Undergraduate internship program funded by the Mathews Center and New College at University of Alabama
- Named in honor of Jean O’Connor-Snyder - event planner for Dr. Mathews and director of the Capstone Men and Women at the University of Alabama (1969 – 1975)
- Participating Institutions:
  - AUBURN UNIVERSITY
  - University of Alabama
  - University of Montevallo
  - Tuskegee University
  - University of Alabama at Birmingham
  - Stillman College
  - Miles College
Auburn University student Hunter Morgan working at Comet Grove Community Garden in Oak Grove, Alabama
Jean O’Connor-Snyder Community-Based Research Internship

- For the past four years, Auburn University’s College of Liberal Arts has worked with the Mathews Center on intern-related programming.
- Dr. Mark Wilson has developed a series of projects that focus on community engagement and capacity building. These projects have thrived as a result of Dr. Wilson’s dedication to building collaborative partnerships.
- Partnerships currently exist with Central High School in Phenix City, Smiths Station High School, Dadeville High School, and several community-based groups and organizations.
- The Living Democracy project and the Comet Grove summer internship are examples of building true engagement. Both projects emphasize partnerships and extended engagement.
Jean O’Connor-Snyder Community-Based Research Internship

- Living Democracy (AU and the Kettering Foundation)
  - Connect students with communities through projects that are developed collaboratively
  - Provide students with a foundation in public journalism and community engagement
  - Embed student interns in the communities to live and learn from the citizens, while also assisting with the collaborative project
Jean O’Connor-Snyder Community-Based Research Internship

- Comet Grove Summer Internship
  - Community-based experience that exposes interns to public decision making and community engagement firsthand
  - Students assist with garden activities over a period of two-months
  - Students reflect on how the citizens of Oak Grove identified a public problem (hunger and access to healthy food), sought out existing resources (a non-functioning Christmas tree farm), and made commitments to act (organizational garden meetings at town hall)
  - How did Oak Grove, a community of approximately 600, develop and sustain Comet Grove? Can they address other public issues in the same way?
Discussion