

# Center to expand, strengthen program that steers kids away from jailhouse

BY LAYLA GARMIS  
THE CHRONICLE

The Winston-Salem State University Center for Community Safety is looking to impact even more young lives with its STARS (Students Taking Action and Reaching Success) program.

The program – launched two years ago – is currently offered at five local schools. STARS facilitators guide students in character- and confidence-building exercises. It addresses the correlation between low student performance and incarceration rates.

"This is really a prevention model that'll allow kids to make better decisions," said Center for Community Safety Executive Director Alvin Atkinson. "It comes in and it really just helps lift the students up. If we can target our efforts, then the academics will go up and the kids will feel good about themselves, and that's really the key."

On Monday at Knollwood Baptist Church, trainers from the Lions International Foundation – led current and future STARS facilitators in a daylong workshop that explored the Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence OST program, a social and emotional learning curriculum that will be incorporated into STARS. The session was organized by the Twin City Host Lions Club, one of the nearly 46,000 chapters of the revered community service organization.

"I think if you teach young people how to navigate adolescence, then they're going to be successful in every aspect of their lives," said Peggy Willis, a Lions Quest trainer from Oakbrook, Ill. "...If you give



Frances Portillo leads the workshop.

Photos by Layla Garmis



Twin City Host Lions Club members on hand to support the workshop were (from left): Penny Willis, JoAnne Goetz, Slava Driglov (back row), Alvin Atkinson and President John McKenzie.

them the skills and you teach them how to use the skills, then you set them up for success."

The workshop was supported by a \$10,000 grant that the Twin City Host Lions Club secured from the Lions Quest Foundation on behalf of STARS.

By supporting STARS, Twin City Host Lions Club President John McKenzie said the Club, which is home to roughly 50 members, hopes to help young people get – and stay – on the path to success.

"Kids are our future, we know that," he remarked. "Winston-Salem's got such great opportunities – great kids – and the STARS program and the

Lions Quest being a part of it are a good way to make them a strong part of the community."

STARS facilitator Latoya Price said the program has already seen positive results.

"The change in the students has been, in my opinion, amazing," said Price, who helps facilitate the in-school programs at Hanes, Philo-Hill and Northwest Middle Schools. (STARS is offered as an after school program at some sites.)

Dr. Gwendolyn Johnson-Green, director of Alternative Education for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, praised STARS as one of the district's most "most effective, suc-

cessful initiatives."

"STARS is an initiative that should be a model – a success model – for others to follow," declared Johnson-Green.

The Downtown School, where Atkinson's wife, Jan, serves as principal, will become the sixth STARS school next month and the first site that is not an Equity Plus school (a school where the majority of the student body hails from low income households). Atkinson wants to eventually expand the program to all middle schools in the county. He also hopes the alliances his agency has formed through the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Community Safety Partnership Coalition (CSPC) – which includes the school system, the Twin City Host Lions Club and Silver Lining Youth Services – will help STARS reach a broader cross-section of youth.

"We think in time, it will really make a difference in reducing that pathway, that school to prison pipeline – that's what we're interrupting," Atkinson said of the program. "We're hoping we can get the community to join in."

For more information about STARS, visit <http://centerforcommunitysafety.org>.

## Bennett tuition untouched; WFU's increased

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

The Bennett College Board of Trustees has approved a freeze in tuition, fees and room charges for the academic year 2014-2015. New and returning Bennett students will pay \$17,230 in tuition and fees next year.

President Rosalind Fuse-Hall explained that the board agreed. "Bennett College understands the financial situation facing our students and their families. It is important that their academic success is not stymied by the cost of a college education."

Total enrollment at Bennett College is 629 students, and 98 percent of these undergraduates receive some form of financial aid.

The move by Bennett College is an unusual one as colleges in the Triad area and across the country find it necessary to move in the opposite direction. Wake Forest University Trustees, for example, recently approved an undergraduate tuition hike of 3.25 percent for the 2014-2015 academic year. Undergraduate tuition will increase from the current \$44,200 to \$45,638 next year. With changes in room, board and other fees, the overall cost of attendance at Wake Forest is expected to increase 3.8 percent to \$62,538.

WFU President Nathan Hatch said the increase – the smallest percentage increase in 30 years – is necessary to keep the school competitive.

The current cost of attendance for on-campus students at Bennett is \$26,322. Next year, that figure will increase by \$192 in compliance with a state tax on meal plans as well as an increase in the health insurance.



Fuse-Hall

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