

New initiative looks to help education shortfalls

Local businesses commit \$22 million to help WS/FCS

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

In an attempt to address the growing student achievement gap in the area, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WS/FCS) has announced a new partnership called Project Impact that will feed \$45 million into early childhood education and other programs over the next six years.

With funding from local businesses, the initiative will look to improve third-grade reading and math proficiency and close literacy gaps with WS/FCS as compared to other urban school districts in the state.

According to sources, \$22 million has already been committed to the initiative by local employers and foundations including Flow Companies, BB&T, Wake Forest Baptist, Novant Health, Reynolds American Foundation and The Winston-Salem Foundation. The remaining \$23 million will be provided by other businesses and individuals in the area to help with pre-kindergarten expansion in the area and other projects to benefit local schools.

Project Impact was announced last week during the Winston-Salem Foundation's annual community luncheon. President of the foundation Scott Wierman said, "We can't just look at the school system to fix issues in our schools without any help.

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-Amanda Gordon, coordinator for the AIG

entire community to step forward and say we're going to support these kids," he said.

Both parents and teachers say they are excited to see what kind of impact the initiative will have on students. Mercedes Bridges, a parent of two students at Ashley Elementary school said seeing local employers lending a hand to help students reach their potential shows just how important education is.

"Initiatives like Project Impact will show students just how important education is," she said. "I'm excited to see what it brings to schools in the area."

Amanda Gordon, coordinator for the AIG (Academically or Intellectually Gifted) program at Diggs-Latham Elementary School, said impacting a student's growth starts as early as birth. She said that although she doesn't know all the details of the program, she has seen the impact the pre-K program has had on her students.

"Children learn just by interacting. It doesn't always have to be a formal school setting," said Gordon. "It's great that we now have a program to help strengthen

the pre-K program in the area. As far as impacting students' growth, it starts when the child is born. I think the initiative can make a real difference for students across the district."

Local school board officials are confident that by implementing more pre-kindergarten programs, they will see growth in third-grade reading scores and high school graduation rates. There are currently 1,200 financially disadvantaged children in Forsyth County who are currently pre-K eligible but not served.

A number of studies have proven pre-K programs help low-income students transition into kindergarten, which results in higher reading and math scores once they reach the third grade.

Superintendent Dr. Beverly Emory said the school system and various community groups share the sense of urgency to respond to the needs of students with a proficiency gap. She said Project Impact will spark meaningful change.

"I deeply appreciate the vision of local business leaders and individuals for creating Project Impact as a catalyst for mean-

ingful change, enabling our schools to implement programs and measure their effectiveness in reaching critical educational goals."

Project Impact will launch this summer with KinderCamp. Emory said the three-week camp will serve more than 200 students who will be entering kindergarten in August. Similar camps were held at school in the area last year.

"This is a huge investment," said Emory. "I don't feel like we can wait another year."

While early education is a major focus of the initiative, Project Impact will also extend learning options and expand staff development and instructional support at a number of schools in the district. Emory noted schools that have been deemed "low performing" will be the schools first targeted.

Last year 29 schools were marked as "low-performing" by the State Board of Education. As a result, the local board of education was required to create an improvement plan for those schools. Emory mentioned they will also be looking to send more reading specialists into struggling elementary schools.

Recommendations for use of funds in the future will be presented to school officials by an advisory board. The board is made up of business leaders, community members, local education leaders, and a parent representative.

For more information on Project Impact and a list of advisory board members, visit www.projectimpact.ws.

Sorority Chapter presents 'Stop the Bullying' workshop

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Over 60 children recently gathered at the Carl H. Russell, Sr. Community Center to participate in a Stop the Bullying workshop held at the learning center.

The ladies of the Sigma Gamma Sorority, Inc. of the "Theta Mu Sigma Chapter brought two inmates from the North Carolina Correctional Center and a security guard to the workshop. Pizzas and soda were served to the

youth and teenagers who attended.

Senior Center Supervisor Ben Piggott was very impressed with the program because of the message which included that you have to watch the company that you keep because you do not know how people can influence you to do wrong things instead of doing the right things.

The inmates demonstrated to the youth how some of them had made themselves to become prey

to bullying in how they walked, talked and the way they stood around their peers. The inmates also showed youth preventive methods to stop bullying in school, home and in the city. They also said if these methods do not work, you need to go to authorities, including other adults or police.

The sorority gave a Stop the Bullying book by author Michael Fry called "The Odd Squad Bully Bait" to each child that won the raffle.



Submitted photo
Ben Piggott, back row, stands with women of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc.'s Theta Mu Sigma Chapter and two youth from the Carl H. Russell Sr. Community Center. The chapter sponsored the "Stop the Bullying" workshop and the youth won two books about the topic.

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