

Friday, October 12, 2007

Corporate partners sought for Communities in Schools

Charlotte Business Journal - by Todd Cohen

An estimated 73% of the U.S. students who enter high school graduate in four years.

But in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, only 63% of those students earn a diploma in four years. Locally, 1,883 students dropped out last year.

Those dropouts' cost to society over their lifetimes will exceed \$393.5 million, according to **Communities in Schools of Charlotte-Mecklenburg**.

To help students stay in school and become prepared for life, Communities in Schools works with students and their parents to build the relationships and provide the resources they need.

That effort has grown from working with 80 students at J.T. Williams Junior High School in 1985 to serving more than 4,500 students at 33 schools in this year.

Communities in Schools' partnerships with corporations are key to the organization's success. And to help meet the rising demand for its services, Communities in Schools is expanding its effort to create such partnerships.

"Without them, we would not have the financial resources needed for us to hire more site coordinators and touch the lives of more students," says Bill Anderson, executive director of Communities in Schools.

The agency has 41 site coordinators, including 16 added this year under a new contract with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.

Those individuals play the critical role of developing relationships with volunteers to find the best fit for students -- a role local school officials "don't have the luxury or time to develop," Anderson says.

He joined Communities in Schools about a year ago after more than 30 years in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools as a special-education teacher, assistant principal, principal and assistant superintendent.

With a new partnership with **Duke Energy Corp.**, Communities in Schools is adding a site coordinator at Phillip O. Berry Academy of Technology who will recruit and coordinate company volunteers.

Duke employees will volunteer as tutors in the after-school tutorial program at the school. And the company will sponsor a Duke Energy Day at the school to encourage students to consider careers in engineering, computer science and other technology fields.

Employees also will host job-shadowing events and student internships.

Communities in Schools modeled the Duke partnership on a nine-year-old arrangement with **Goodrich Corp.** at Westerly Hills Elementary School.

Communities in Schools also offers a program for sixth-graders who would be the first in their families to attend college, and two programs to help 10th-, 11th- and 12th-graders apply for college.

While students may drop out during high school, the process leading to that decision starts much earlier, Anderson notes. So Communities in Schools plans to focus more of its energies on elementary schools. "We can't expect the high schools to fix the problems" in a student's freshman year, Anderson says.

QUICK INFO

COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

Board president: Kathy Habluetzel, Grant Thornton

Executive director: Bill Anderson

Phone: (704) 335-0601

Address: 601 E. Fifth St., Suite 300, Charlotte 28202

Web site:www.cischarlotte.org

Todd Cohen is editor and publisher of the Philanthropy Journal at www.philanthropyjournal.org. He can be reached at (919) 573-4642. Send story ideas to tcohen@ajf.org or fax them to (919) 573-4660.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.