

Syracuse schools to use grant to raise literacy levels of adults on North Side

Syracuse district to use \$975,000 grant for North Side education program.

Friday, May 29, 2009

By Sapna Kollali

Staff writer

The Syracuse school district will use a three-year, \$975,000 state grant to help educate adults and families on the North Side.

The district will work with the Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County - a network of local agencies focused on improving the city's and county's literacy level - to create the Syracuse North Sector Literacy Zone. School, city, county and coalition officials will announce their plans today.

Much of the grant will fund a new Family Welcome Center, a central site for families and adults to access services and information to improve their literacy, help them escape poverty and better support their children's schooling.

Eleven Literacy Zone grants were awarded statewide. Locally, Madison-Oneida BOCES, in Verona, received a \$600,000, three-year grant.

Syracuse schools Superintendent Dan Lowengard said the focus on adult literacy will help the district educate its children.

"A big part of developing literacy skills is having literate parents," he said. "Our philosophy is to remove all barriers that get in the way of kids succeeding. This is one of the major stumbling blocks, especially for our (English as a second language) families."

Gail Tauber, a literacy liaison in the district's adult education program, said the grant is expected to help about 125 families a year who are not currently using community services and centers.

About 30 community agencies partnered with the district for this grant, and Tauber said additional agencies could sign on as the program grows. The 30 initial partners are contributing staff, resources and in-kind donations worth an additional \$2 million to \$3 million, which does not include district contributions, she said.

Literacy Zones are a state initiative to target urban and rural communities with high poverty and low literacy and English proficiency rates. Staff will help connect residents to education, government and social service providers in addition to helping them with their literacy skills, said Kathy Lent, coordinator of the district's adult and continuing education programs.

"Literacy is more than reading and writing. It includes health literacy, financial literacy, community literacy," she said.

Anyone age 16 or older who is not enrolled in school can participate, Tauber said.

The main family center will be at the North Area Athletic and Education Center on Pond Street. There will also be six satellite centers: the Refugee Assistance Center, the Assisi Center, the White Branch Library, and Franklin, Dr. Weeks and Dr. King elementary schools.

"We want to meet them somewhere comfortable and accessible," Tauber said.

The grant will also fund Saturday morning classes for parents to become more familiar with their children's homework and additional GED, language and skills classes at night for working adults, Tauber said. Lent said the refugee center has about 100 people on a waiting list for English classes.

Tauber said the county's Literacy Coalition is a partner on the grant, and the school district is a member of the coalition, which formed in early 2008. She said the new state grant provides funding and structure for a movement that is already under way locally.

Lent said she will advertise for a coordinator position, case managers, an aide and instructors for ESL and GED courses. She hopes the program will be running by July 1.

Lent said an application for a West Side literacy zone was not accepted, but the district will resubmit it if additional state money is available.

Sapna Kollali can be reached at skollali@syracuse.com or 470-3257.

http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2009/05/syracuse_schools_to_use_grant.html