



Future local principals complete training to lead urban public schools in face of looming mass retirement

Fairfield County Community Foundation brings together four school districts to create pipeline of qualified principals prepared to narrow achievement gap

NORWALK, June 15, 2009—Twenty-nine prospective public school principals recently completed a year of specialized training to fill a looming leadership void in Fairfield County's four urban school districts. Five have already moved up to new leadership positions.

Connecticut has the largest achievement gap in the country, and Fairfield County's 92 urban public schools face a new crisis. Within five years, half of the principals and assistant principals leading public schools in Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk and Stamford will retire, and there are few qualified candidates to take their place. The combined enrollment in the four school districts is 60,000 students.

The 29 prospective principals made up the first class of the Fairfield County Community Foundation's Urban School Leaders Fellowship program. The program was initiated by the Fairfield County Community Foundation and created in collaboration with the Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk and Stamford school districts, the Connecticut Center for School Change and the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education. It will increase the number and diversity of principals who are committed to urban education and working in Fairfield County's four urban school districts.

The year-long fellowship program is part of the Foundation's School Leadership Initiative to help close the achievement gap between Fairfield County's urban and suburban public school districts.

"Good teachers are crucial," said Susan Ross, president and CEO of the Fairfield County Community Foundation. "Yet it's the school principal who establishes the vision for the school and creates its culture, who inspires the teachers and staff to excel, who is the instructional leader, who recruits the community and parents to help children succeed, and nurtures an environment where children feel safe and can reach their potential."

To qualify for a fellowship, applicants must be a teacher, assistant principal or other

educator with an 092 endorsement on their teaching certificate. They also must want to become a public school principal in Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk or Stamford.

The Urban School Leaders Fellowship program begins where academic preparation ends. Over 12 months, as they continue their regular work, fellows learn how to improve teaching quality and foster a culture that inspires learning. They develop and lead a learning project to improve student performance in their current position in their schools. They also apply their learning first-hand as challenges unfold at their schools.

“We estimate that these twenty-nine fellows will have the opportunity to transform schools that teach tens of thousands of urban children in Fairfield County,” said Ms. Ross. “Although philanthropy makes up a fraction of educational funding, when well targeted, it can achieve significant change.”

The five fellows who have been promoted include Charmaine Worthy, new principal at Dunbar Elementary School in Bridgeport, and Terese Martorella, new literacy curriculum specialist for the Bridgeport Public Schools. In Danbury, Leonard Cerlich is the new principal at Hayestown Avenue School. In Norwalk, James Martinez is the new principal at Fox Run Elementary School. In Stamford, Bryan Olkowski is the new assistant principal at Scofield Magnet Middle School.

Remaining fellows from Bridgeport Public Schools are: Lisa Anderson-Andrews, Classical Studies Academy; Debra Arganese, Central High School; Selena Morgan, John Winthrop School; Deborah Tisdale, Paul Laurence Dunbar School; and Esther Werneck de Almeida, Multicultural Magnet School. Cynthia Fernandes, executive director of Learning and Teaching, was one of the instructors, and Superintendent John Ramos was a guest instructor.

Remaining fellows from Danbury Public Schools are: Deborah Correia, Mill Ridge Primary School; Tina Hislop, Rogers Park Middle School; Deborah Pischke, Park Avenue School; Kenneth Robbins, Rogers Park Middle School; Aldith Scott, Shelter Rock Elementary School; and Jaynti Seshan, Rogers Park Middle School. Associate Superintendent William Glass was an instructor and Superintendent Sal Pascarella was a guest instructor.

Remaining fellows from Norwalk Public Schools are: Anthony Braswell, West Rocks Middle School; Jenna Masone, Brookside School; Helisse Palmore, West Rocks Middle School;

Michael Pisseri, Ponus Ridge Middle School; and Barbara Wood, Brian McMahon High School. Superintendent Sal Corda was one of the instructors.

Remaining fellows from Stamford Public Schools are: Douglas Fetchin, Rippowam Middle School; Alan Hayes, Rippowam Middle School; Thomas Moulketis, Cloonan Middle School; Doreen O’Leary, central office; Susan Paley, Scofield Magnet Middle School; Joseph Palumbo, West Hills High School; Mary Schaefer, Hart Magnet School; and Mark Woodard, Still Meadow Elementary School. Winifred Hamilton, deputy superintendent of Stamford Public Schools, was one of the instructors, and Superintendent Joshua Starr was a guest instructor.

To fund the first class of the Urban School Leaders Fellowship, the Foundation awarded a \$200,000 grant to the Connecticut Center for School Change, which provides program curriculum and management, additional instructors and materials. United Illuminating contributed to the Foundation to support the program in its first year.

The second class of 38 fellows begins their coursework later this month.

The Fairfield County Community Foundation promotes the growth of community and regional philanthropy to improve the quality of life throughout Fairfield County. Individuals, families, corporations and organizations can establish charitable funds and contribute to existing funds. The Foundation also provides philanthropic advisory services, and develops and leads initiatives to tackle critical community issues. It is in compliance with the Council on Foundations’ national standards for community foundations. The Foundation has awarded over \$110 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond. For more information, visit www.fccfoundation.org.

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