

Narratives

Executive Summary

Name of Applicant: Seminole County Public Schools

RSVP Volunteers Proposed: 300

Funds Requested: \$105,000/year

Service Category: Education

With 63,854 students, SCPS is the 12th largest school district in Florida and is comprised of 65 schools - 36 elementary schools, 12 middle schools, 9 high schools, 3 special centers, 2 virtual schools, and 3 charter schools. Across these schools is much ethnic diversity with a minority percentage of 43.92%. SCPS excels in its mission "to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be successful in life;" however, the district is concerned with the percentage of students, mostly from low-income communities, who struggle academically. To address this critical need, the proposed project will recruit senior volunteers to serve as tutors, classroom assistants and in other instructional support positions to enhance learning offered to students. Using research-based strategies such as intergenerational tutoring and mentoring, Seminole RSVP will provide meaningful intergenerational learning experiences that will: (1) improve student academic performance; (2) increase the number of caring adults providing support to students within the school setting; (3) provide supplemental educational experiences to students in grades K-12; and (4) enhance the quality of life for seniors in Seminole County through intergenerational connections.

Strengthening Communities

Located in the heart of Central Florida, Seminole County, once a largely agricultural area, has transformed in the past 30 years to a hub for economic growth including establishment of numerous corporate headquarters and emergence of many high tech companies. The Orlando Sanford International Airport is the third most active international airport in Florida and the 12th most active in the U.S. (Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission, 2010). Seminole County is the fourth smallest county in the state in land area with a population density ranking third highest (2010 U.S.

Narratives

Census). The county's population of 422,718 is culturally and socially diverse with an ethnic breakdown of 3.7% Asian; 11.1% Black; 17.1% Hispanic; 1.8% other; and 66.3% White.

Juxtaposed within this economically growing county though are areas of poverty amid those of affluence. Census data (2010) show a 10.6% countywide poverty rate, with the City of Sanford possessing the highest rate in the county at 20.5%. Correlated to the poverty rate, free and reduced (F/R) priced lunch rates indicate that public schools have high rates of economically disadvantaged students. Nationally, the indicator for high-poverty, high need schools is 35% and above. In SCPS the rate is 45.40%. Further, the district has 1,739 students who are classified as homeless. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), children in poverty are linked to adverse effects on academic performance; physical health concerns; increased stress (thus behavioral issues); and increased incidence of high school dropout. Retention rates, another indicator for potential school dropout, range from 1.33% at the elementary level to 11.91% in high school within SCPS. A clear increase in retentions in the high academic grades reduces the probability of students graduating, thus decreasing the likelihood that retained students will eventually pursue higher education. District data aligns with research, with a trend of students retained two or more times not graduating from high school.

Even with a graduation rate of 93.4% in 2011, many SCPS students struggle with academics. Often these students fall within minority and/or low socioeconomic subgroups. Examination of academic data shows a number of disparities in achievement levels. While the highest graduation rate among Whites is 96.3%, by contrast, the lowest graduation rates were among Blacks, 83.6% and Hispanics, 88.7%. Performance on the 2011 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) offers a further depiction of the magnitude of achievement gaps across ethnic subgroups. FCAT science scores indicate a disparity between White students, at 70.7% proficient, and Black and Hispanic students, at 32.1% and 49.0% respectively. Similar performance gaps exist in math. Proficiency of White students was 85.6%, compared to 58.4% of Black students and 71.4% of Hispanic students. A clear variation across subgroups in graduation attainment and performance is apparent from these statistics. It is evident from

Narratives

the achievement gap in graduation rates, standardized assessment scores, and retention data that supplemental supports are necessary to improve student achievement.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 24% of Seminole County residents are over the age of 55. Of these senior residents, 55% (56,501) are not in the labor force, which provides a significant potential pool of available volunteers for service to the community. Senior residents have opportunities to engage in community-sponsored recreational activities; and local agencies offer services or information about community resources to be provided to individuals; but few opportunities are provided for seniors to offer their services to the community.

The prospect of offering Seminole County senior residents a meaningful experience, combined with the need by public school students to gain additional instructional support creates a dynamic combination to strengthen the local community. For decades, research has demonstrated benefits of tutoring on student achievement. A recent meta-analysis on the effectiveness of volunteer tutoring on student achievement, shows an overall "positive impact" with students receiving these services more likely than non-tutored peers to score higher on "assessments related to letters and words, oral fluency, and writing" (Ritter, Barnett, Denny & Albin, 2009). Further, the impact of intergenerational programs on student achievement, as well as social and emotional development, has been well-researched. In a publication on intergenerational programs in schools (Kaplan, 2001), the impacts of reading enrichment, academic tutoring, mentoring and dropout prevention programs are demonstrated as significant. The publication notes the importance of volunteer availability and patient communication often found with senior volunteers. As such, the Seminole RSVP program design connects the need for individualized, supplemental educational support with research that indicates the appropriateness and positive impact of senior volunteers in tutoring and mentoring settings.

Sources: American Psychological Association. (2011). Effectives of Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness on Children and Youth. Public Interest Directorate; Kaplan, Matthew S. (2001) School-Based Intergenerational Programs. USESCO Institute for Education: Hamburg; Ritter, Barnett, Denny &

Narratives

Albin. (2009) The Effectiveness of Volunteer Tutoring Programs for Elementary and Middle School Students: A Meta-Analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1): 3-38.

Recruitment and Development

In recognition of the importance of volunteer service in schools, the district operates a successful Dividends School Volunteer Program. In 2010-11, the program recruited and placed 25,000 volunteers with over 490,000 hours in schools. In support of the Dividends Program, the goal of the Seminole RSVP program is to increase student achievement meaningful intergenerational learning experiences among students and senior community members as an essential part of each school's operation.

Individual schools will determine volunteer needs and coordinate with the RSVP program staff to place senior volunteers who will provide students supplemental, yet essential, educational assistance to improve student learning through individual or small group instruction and other co-curricular activities. Volunteers may request placement in an array of opportunities such as: Reading Acceleration Program; Mentors Program; Masters Tutoring Program; Math Super Star Program; Super Scientists; Publishing Lab Program; language interpreters; docents for the Student Museum; on-site field trip chaperones for the Environmental Studies Center; and clerical support. Volunteer experiences may include classroom service, which provides volunteers to assist in the classroom on a regular basis with individual or small groups of students. These volunteers work under the supervision of a teacher or school staff member.

Recruitment and Placement: The program will coordinate with the Seminole County Government, local municipalities' senior recreation programs, and senior community organizations to recruit senior volunteers. Prior to placement in a volunteer experience, participants' skills and interests will be assessed for most appropriate matches within the program. A database will be maintained that will highlight each senior volunteer's area of interest and associated area of strength.

Upon receipt of a volunteer request, the Project Director will establish with each volunteer deliverables using a simple form, which will serve to ensure student need is met and the work provided

Narratives

by the volunteer is directed and meaningful.

Retention and Recognition: Retention efforts will focus on appropriate preparation, continued guidance, skill development, and volunteer appreciation. Throughout the year volunteer orientation sessions will be held to familiarize volunteers to the school environment, including a review of the district's mission in connection to the RSVP program goals. At this orientation, volunteers will be engaged in learning on how to effectively support academic success and to work with different types of learners.

To assist volunteers in actively developing their own skills and abilities, participants will be provided professional development. Professional development topics may include: strategies for tutoring students at varying levels of proficiency; literacy strategies for classroom support; and techniques for supporting students in the school library (use of computers, organizing books, and use of digital resources). Periodic learning community meetings will be held to provide volunteers the opportunity to reflect on interactions with students, offer feedback and suggestions on the program activities/structure, and reflect on the meaning of community service and their own individual development.

To ensure the seniors are well informed and engaged in the volunteer process, the Project Director will be available for questions, concerns or suggestions and will provide program updates, special events news, highlights on the work of volunteers, and notices of available professional development opportunities.

In the same vein as the district's "You Make Us Proud," used to recognize the exceptional efforts of students, staff, and community members, the Project Director will coordinate "spontaneous appreciation" efforts. These efforts may include notes/drawings from students tutored or mentored, recognition of service at school board or Parent-Teacher-Student Association meetings, or notes from administration highlighting a job well-done. In addition, the district will host an assembly each school year to honor senior volunteers for their service. School principals and other instructional leaders will nominate outstanding senior volunteers who have dedicated time and efforts in extraordinary ways.

Narratives

As an assurance that the program will be managed and implemented with fidelity, the Project Director will attend appropriate technical assistance and training related to community service and volunteer development.

Program Management

Under supervision of Superintendent Dr. Bill Vogel, the Deputy Superintendent for Instructional Excellence and Equity, Dr. Anna-Marie Cote will provide administrative oversight for the Seminole RSVP program. Dr. Cote has been in the field of education for over 30 years. Eleven of these years have been in district administration for the district. Experience outside of administration has been in the area of curriculum development, leading and managing the district's successful effort to attain unitary status, and as a classroom teacher. Dr. Cote has been instrumental in implementing successful student achievement programs in her tenure.

Through the Seminole RSVP program, Dr. Cote will supervise a Project Director who will implement the program on a day-to-day basis. The role of the Project Director will be to recruit, place and support volunteers in the program. As part of this responsibility, this individual will coordinate with school administrators to ensure comprehensive school-community involvement models are in place to support senior volunteers within all schools in the district. Further, the Project Director will supervise activities related to the approval of volunteers into the school district which includes coordinating security clearance (background check and fingerprinting) of senior participants as necessary.

The Project Director has been included in the program at 50% effort. The Project Director will also support the district's school volunteer program; however, many of the recruitment and retention efforts will be dual purposed.

As indicated previously, the Project Director will coordinate with the local county office, municipalities and senior community organizations to recruit senior volunteers to the program. Prior to placement in a volunteer experience, RSVP participants' skills and interests will be assessed for most appropriate matches within the program. Upon request of a volunteer assignment, the Project Director

Narratives

will establish with each senior volunteer deliverables using a simple form, which will serve to ensure student need is met and the work provided by the volunteers is directed and meaningful.

Program goals and objectives will be monitored by the Project Director, with a specific focus on the impact of volunteerism on student achievement. The Project Director will work in close collaboration with the district's Office of Assessment and Accountability to analyze student proficiency as a result of the program implementation. This analysis will be conducted on an annual basis, with results reported to senior administration. Program modifications will be made based on the outcome of the continuous evaluation of success. Data will be tracked over the duration of the program and trends will be analyzed to ensure the impact of volunteer service is documented.

In addition to the impact of senior volunteerism on student achievement, the program will monitor the effect of the experience on senior volunteers. Surveys and focus groups will be conducted annually to measure the extent to which seniors benefited individually from the experience in regard to the development of new skills, leadership potential, and the overall quality of life.

The results of these evaluation opportunities will be utilized by the Project Director as sustainability resources are sought to maintain and potentially expand Seminole RSVP. The Project Director will manage current resources, ensuring appropriate and efficient use of funds while seeking to secure continued support of the program in future years. Continued community engagement will be conducted to ensure the importance and outcomes of the school volunteer program and the connection to senior volunteers is communicated, valued, and understood by citizens, business representatives and local government.

Organizational Capability

In addition to the experience and management capacity gained by the project's administrators and staff, the district maintains a solid organizational capacity within financial and data management functions. The district's departments of Finance, Purchasing, Information Services, and Assessment & Accountability each have qualified personnel and data systems to ensure the ability to maintain records

Narratives

as required by the grant. Each of these departments has an extensive history of successful management of special projects and has served vital roles in the execution of numerous federally funded opportunities utilizing sound fiscal management procedures. An annual independent audit is performed each year in compliance with requirements applicable to each major program and internal control over compliance in accordance with OMB Circular A-133. The district's Department of Finance manages a multi-million dollar budget which includes federal, state and local sources of revenue. On the instruction side, the district has a leadership team that continuously reviews program impacts on student achievement -- the Instructional Support Team. This team is comprised of executive and senior-level district administrators who assess and suggest methods for improvement based on the most relevant research-based strategies. Management and reporting of performance measures will be coordinated without issue due to the comprehensive level of expertise and oversight of these teams.

The school district has an array of past success with other relevant educational and community programs across Seminole County. As described in the management plan, district personnel responsible for direct implementation and administrative project oversight will provide an expansive capacity for coordinating the management and execution of educational programs, to include programs sponsored by federal and state funding sources. The district has been awarded several competitive grants through the U.S. Department of Education and the Florida Department of Education for student programs which cross multiple disciplines and needs. A sampling of these accomplishments include: Magnet Assistance Program, U.S. Department of Education, \$2.1 million; Foreign Language Assistance Program, U.S. Department of Education, \$443,000; and three 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Florida Department of Education, \$6.6 million.

In addition to these federally and state-funded programs focused on improving student achievement, the district operates a highly successful school volunteer program which is a districtwide effort that encourages and promotes community involvement in Seminole County Public Schools. In 2010-2011, the program recruited and placed 25,000 volunteers with over 490,000 hours in the public schools,

Narratives

kindergarten through high school. The Dividends School Volunteer Program is housed in the Office of Community Involvement and Public Information, whose mission it is to create partnerships between the school district and the community by promoting public awareness, recruiting human and financial resources, and providing positive support for teachers, staff and students.

Due to the existing school volunteer program, the district is secure in the capacity for adequate facilities and procedures. The program will utilize district policies and procedures regarding purchasing, personnel management and travel to implement the Seminole RSVP.

Staff expertise in developing community partnerships and delivering a successful school volunteer program, combined with the experience and achievement of the school district in development and implementation of educational programs, creates a high capacity for successful delivery of the proposed program in Seminole County.

Other

Not applicable.

PNS Amendment (if applicable)

Not applicable.