

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

With over 65,000 students, Seminole County Public Schools (SCPS) is among the largest school districts in Florida and comprises 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 ethnic minorities accounting for 45.3% of the student population. 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, RSVP of SCPS 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 (OSIA) 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 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The county's population of 430,838 is culturally and socially diverse with an ethnic breakdown of 4.2% Asian; 10.8% Black; 18.2% Hispanic; 1.7% other; and 65.1% White.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), 26% of Seminole County residents are over the age of 55. Of these senior residents, 59.8% (66,738) are not in the labor force, which provides a significant potential pool of available volunteers for service to the community. Further, there are 11,246 veterans who reside in the county who are ages 65+ (Note: The Department of Veteran Affairs does not provide data that allows the district to determine number of veterans ages 55+). Senior residents, including veterans, have opportunities to engage in community-sponsored recreational activities, and local

## Narratives

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.

Juxtaposed within this intergenerational, economically growing county though are areas of poverty amid those of affluence. Census data (2010) show a 10.8% countywide poverty rate, with the City of Sanford possessing the highest poverty rate in the county at 20.1%. 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 47.0%. Further, the district has over 1,000 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 83.84% in 2013, 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 87.07%, by contrast, the lowest graduation rates were among Blacks, 71.93% and Hispanics, 79.04%. Performance on the 2014 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) offers a further depiction of the magnitude of achievement gaps across ethnic subgroups. On FCAT reading, a significant gap exists between subgroups, with 78.6% of White students who are proficient, 44.2% of Black students and 61.2% of Hispanic students. Further, FCAT science scores indicate a disparity between White students, at 71.8% proficient, and Black and Hispanic students, at 34% and 53.9% respectively. Similar performance gaps exist in math. Proficiency of White students was 78.4%, compared to 44.2% of Black students and 62.5% of Hispanic students. A clear variation across subgroups in graduation attainment and performance is apparent from these statistics.

It is evident from the achievement gap in graduation rates, standardized assessment scores, and

## **Narratives**

retention data that supplemental supports are necessary to improve student achievement. 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. Through the RSVP of SCPS program, the service activities described in the work plans (i.e. tutoring, mentoring, English as a Second Language support, and early childhood literacy activities) will address the following National Performance Measure Outcomes in the Primary Focus Area of Education: improved academic performance in literacy and mathematics; improved school attendance; and provision of early childhood literacy support to families. Volunteers may request placement in an array of opportunities such as: Reading Acceleration Program; Mentors Program; Super Scientists; language interpreters; docents for the Student Museum; on-site field trip chaperones for the Environmental Studies Center; community outreach to new parents; and clerical support.

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 RSVP of SCPS 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. The ability of the county's senior citizens to engage in volunteerism that not only serves youth in the county, but also allows these individuals to use lifelong experiences and expertise (such as the veteran population's specialized aptitudes) that will provide major benefits to general classroom instruction.

The National Performance Measure outcomes and outputs will be monitored by the RSVP Project Director, with a specific focus on the impact of volunteerism on student achievement and attendance. The Project Director will work in close collaboration with the district's Office of Assessment and

## Narratives

Accountability to analyze student proficiency as a result of the program implementation. Data to be collected will include state standardized assessment performance, student attendance, and qualitative data related to perceptions of program impact. 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. These results will be shared with district leadership and the RSVP Advisory Council, which will be described in greater detail in the "program management" section.

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 & 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 2013-2014, the program recruited and placed 25,398 volunteers with nearly 430,000 hours in schools. In support of the Dividends Program, the goal of the RSVP of SCPS 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.

## **Narratives**

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; Super Scientists; language interpreters; docents for the Student Museum; on-site field trip chaperones for the Environmental Studies Center; community outreach to new parents; 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, veteran programs (i.e. Department of Veteran Affairs), and senior community organizations to recruit senior volunteers. The local region has a wide variety of recruitment pools to focus enrollment of RSVP volunteers with the requisite skills, talents, and diversity to meet the program's targets as outlined in the work plan presented. The recruitment campaign will include interaction and presentations to local senior recreation groups, senior community organizations, veteran groups, and local colleges/universities' alumni groups. To ensure a pool of volunteers to serve the English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, the Project Director will also work closely with the district's Coordinator for ESL/World Languages to target families who utilize the district's Family Immigration Connection Center, as well as other local community agencies (i.e. faith-based organizations and interest clubs) that have high populations of citizens, ages 55+, who may be interested in serving as RSVP volunteers.

Prior to placement in a volunteer experience, participants' skills and interests will be assessed for the 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 by the volunteer is directed and meaningful. All new volunteers will attend an RSVP orientation training session which will focus on the goals and outcomes of the program in Seminole County, as well as detail the rules and regulations for serving as a volunteer within the school district. Senior volunteers will also receive follow-up

## **Narratives**

training related to best practices in student support programming. These sessions are further detailed in the application's "retention and recognition" section below.

### **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 with 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). The program will also have a RSVP Resource Room at the district office to provide volunteers a dedicated space for preparing activities for students, researching best practices, and sharing information with other volunteers. The resource room will allow access to technology, educational tools for checkout, and hard copy resources for volunteer self-development. In addition, 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

## **Narratives**

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. 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. Walt Griffin and Deputy Superintendent for Instructional Excellence and Equity Dr. Anna-Marie Cote, the Executive Director for Human Resources and Professional Standards Mr. Boyd Karns will provide administrative oversight for the RSVP of SCPS program.

Through the RSVP of SCPS program, Mr. Karns -- as the Sponsor Executive -- will supervise a Project Director (working title: Manager, Dividends and RSVP) who will implement the program on a day-to-day basis. Ms. Misa Mills will serve as the RSVP of SCPS Project Director. 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. This coordination will include monitoring of volunteer placement and ensuring that RSVP program regulations are maintained at the school sites/volunteer stations. 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, and establishing Memorandums of Understanding for the program with school sites/volunteer stations. To monitor volunteer service at the school sites/volunteer stations, the RSVP staff will collect volunteer sign-in information from the school level through an automated check-in system already established at the sites. In addition, school administrators will provide program staff information on students served through the program. The Project Director's role will be supported by part-time clerical assistance.

The school district, including existing staff assigned to the RSVP program, has significant experience implementing a major volunteer program in the Primary Focus Area of education. With over 25,000 volunteers in the districtwide volunteer program, Dividends. In addition, RSVP of SCPS is currently the incumbent RSVP program in Seminole County and brings two years of direct experience with the

## **Narratives**

Corporation for National and Community Service.

The RSVP Program Director will provide 65% of time on RSVP programming and 35% of time on the school district's volunteer program. Within the budget, 30% of the salary is requested from the CNCS federal share, with 35% of the RSVP Program Director's time devoted to RSVP programming funded by local school district funds (as in-kind match). The remaining 35% will be funded by the school district and use of time for this portion will be the district's volunteer program. The Project Director will track and document time spent in support of RSVP programming versus time spent on the school district's volunteer program.

The school district will ensure that RSVP programming has a unique identity separate from the school district's general volunteer program through the use of signage and branded promotional materials, as well as the development of a dedicated newsletter and website link. RSVP within the school district will be branded with a specific logo and include acknowledgement of CNCS funding on all related materials (i.e. recruitment/promotional, training and recognition materials). Further, the RSVP program will host separate and distinct recognition events and recruitment events which are publicized as CNCS funded.

RSVP 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

## **Narratives**

resources are sought to maintain and potentially expand RSVP of SCPS. 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.

To ensure a wide representation from the community in the planning, implementation and sustainability for RSVP of SCPS, the school district will develop an advisory group composed of community members from local organizations who support senior citizens, a current senior volunteer within the school district, representatives from the schools, and district staff. The district will reach out to local community organizations who serve adults who speak languages other than English to ensure support of the ESL work plan, as well as organizations which support retired professionals. This variety of voices on the advisory group will provide a well-rounded, continuous review of the program to ensure goals and objectives are being realized. The advisory group will also guide the Project Director and district staff on methods for securing sustainable resources for the program.

The RSVP Project Director will serve as a member of the advisory group. Recommendations made by the advisory group will be presented before the district's Instructional Support Team, a team of district-level instructional executives to include the school district's Deputy Superintendent, Executive Directors and instructional Coordinators. Decisions regarding program modifications will be considered as recommended by the advisory group.

### **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 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

## **Narratives**

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 composed 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 (multi-year awards) 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 five 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Florida Department of Education, \$11.7 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 2013-2014, the program recruited and placed 25,398 volunteers with nearly 430,000 hours in schools. 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.

The district is also secure in the capacity for adequate facilities and procedures. The program will utilize district policies and procedures regarding purchasing, inventory management, risk management, personnel management and travel to implement the RSVP of SCPS.

## **Narratives**

The program will have three paid staff members, to include a Project Director and two part-time clerical assistants. The Project Director has served in her capacity for two years and sits on the Florida Senior Corp Association Inc. as Vice President. One of the two clerical assistants has been with the program for nearly one and a half years and has been an employee of the school district for eight years. The sponsor executive will provide in-kind administrative oversight to the RSVP program implementation. This individual is the Executive Director of Human Resources and Professional Standards, and has been with the district for 25 years with positions such as school principal and Director of Employee and Governmental Relations/Personnel Services. Collectively, these RSVP positions will be responsible for the ongoing operation of the program and will ensure the accomplishment of project outcomes through continuous monitoring of activities and impact.

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**

N/A

### **PNS Amendment (if applicable)**

N/A