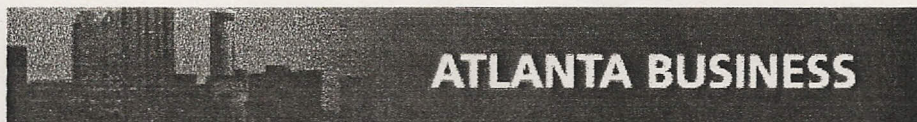


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## Educators reach out for new solutions

Innovations revive interest in teaching

Diane Faulkner

Look around a number of Duval County public schools and you'll notice something's changed. The formerly insular community is looking outside traditional resources to revive an honored vocation.

A subtle shift in recruiting methods coupled with a new focus on leadership is raising the quality of education and providing measurable results for the most skeptical taxpayer.

A wider pool

Two partnerships center on widening the education labor pool and restructuring principal-teacher roles.

The first pairs the University of North Florida with Duval County Public Schools and focuses on the teacher shortage. This pairing facilitates the Urban Teacher Residency Partnership (UTRP), which, according to Katherine Kasten, dean of UNF's College of Education and Human Services, "recruits people who have at least a bachelor's degree in a [needed] content area, an interest in working with young people, and no preparation in teacher education -- just a desire to teach."

UTRP participants often give up more lucrative career choices, serving as an example to students that giving back to the community is as satisfying as increasing personal net worth.

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"Program participants' academic records and job experience are considered in selection," Kasten said. "After completing nine credit hours of graduate work in education that includes a practicum and assignment of a mentor, a math professional, for example, becomes a math teacher."

These teachers' field experiences can be applied in the classroom to offer students real-life examples of how school subjects impact work life.

While UTRP's accelerated teaching certificate process provides a growing number of teachers each year, 22 in 2000 and 67 in 2001, the program is still evolving. The turnover rate for program teachers is 20 percent. Not all teachers who leave the school district return exit surveys, so all the reasons for leaving are unclear.

The 29 state-approved teacher preparation programs produce slightly fewer than 6,000 teachers to fill more than 15,000 annual vacancies. The shortage puts additional stress on mentors.

One problem: Compensation for teachers is low compared with neighboring states. Florida averages \$5,000 per year below Georgia and Alabama. Teacher pay also is not comparable to what other college graduates can earn.

The other partnership picks up where UTRP leaves off. A coalition of top Florida business leaders known as the Florida Council of 100 sponsors the Partnership to Advance School Success (PASS). Concentrating on "D"-rated elementary schools as scored by FCAT, the coalition recruits CEOs of major corporations.

With a donation of \$100,000 in matched funds, the CEO makes a three-year commitment to coach principals in managerial skills. In return for advice on financial planning, labor relations, time management and organizational development, the school provides measurable proof of student improvement.

Spending at least one day a month in the school, a CEO works with a principal to establish a business plan to produce one verifiable year's educational advancement in every student at each grade. Where the education community once thought businesses had only funding to provide, PASS proves viewing education as a business can bring fresh insight into the field.

#### Charting a course

"Can you imagine getting on a plane with a pilot who has no flight plan?" asks Frances Gupton, principal of West Riverside Elementary

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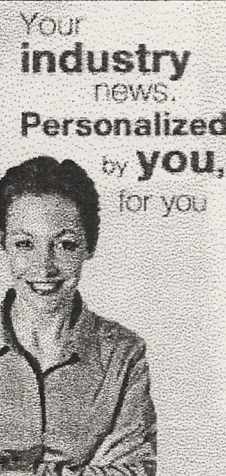
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School. "Principals have a product -- academics. Our business plan is like our flight plan. We learn to look at data [from teacher goal attainment and student test scores], see where we are, where we need to improve and work on implementing improvements."

While teachers are well prepared in teaching methods, it is the behavioral and intellectual discipline they instill that will make or break their careers, Gupton said. "Teaching colleges only touch on discipline, so the principals must become more instructional leaders than administrators."

Over the past two years working with mentor, Kevin M. Twomey, president of The St. Joe Co., Gupton has completely changed the way she runs the school and is on her way to an "A" rating.

"Every instructional leader needs a business mentor, because it is a business here," Gupton said. "When our test scores go up, our stock goes up."

Performance management, where individual student achievement is tied to teacher goals, is monitored monthly at West Riverside. School achievements, goals and budgets are discussed openly. Diagnostics pinpoint where each child is falling behind or racing ahead, and teaching plans are tweaked accordingly.

"Test data now drives instruction in the classroom," Gupton said.

Gupton also provides regular classes for families to encourage home support of educational goals. An influx of immigrants necessitated an English-as-a-second-language course. Other classes prepare parents to assist with homework.

West Riverside uses operating funds to offer free classes, bus transportation plus dinner, tutoring and baby-sitting services. Parent participation is exploding, Gupton said.

Even school vouchers don't scare her. "Bring 'em on," she said. "That's just healthy competition. If your school's consistently growing students a full year every year and the teachers feel challenged and rewarded, you shouldn't have anything to worry about."

*Diane Faulkner is a correspondent with The Business Journal.*



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