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EDUCATION HELP BOOST URBAN TEACHING

Fifty years after the U.S. Supreme Court declared "separate but equal" schools unconstitutional, the American educational system is still not delivering an equal education to all students. Schools in affluent suburban communities generally fare better than those in urban areas, and so do their students.

One reason is the reluctance of many teachers to work in urban schools. That reluctance, combined with an overall shortage of teachers, is making it increasingly difficult to find good teachers for schools in urban areas. No school district should blithely accept such a situation.

In an innovative response, the Broward County School District has established the Urban Teacher Academy Project. This program, at Deerfield Beach, Flanagan, Stranahan and Nova high schools, prepares students for careers in urban education.

DONATIONS AND INFORMATION

Tax-deductible donations to the fund should be made payable to Broward Teacher Fellowship, c/o Broward Education Foundation, 600 SE Third Ave., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301. More information can be found on the Web at www.fau.edu/tlc or by calling 754-321-2030.

Successful program graduates are awarded scholarships to one of the school district's higher-education partners, including Broward Community College and Florida Atlantic, Barry and Nova Southeastern universities. Students receiving these Broward Teacher Fellowship scholarships are assured of a job if they agree to work in Urban Academy schools in Broward County once they've earned their college degrees.

Without the program, about half the teachers in urban schools leave after three years. The hope of UTAP is that the early preparation students receive for the particular challenges of urban teaching will reduce the attrition rate. It's hard to find fault with that logic.

The program already is producing dividends: under the state's "A-Plus" accountability system, teachers who have gone through the UTAP program have helped raise the grades of the urban schools in which they're working.

The district has established a perpetual endowment fund, with interest going toward UTAP scholarships. Community support is needed for this vital initiative. Donors see their contributions enhanced by "matching" funds on up to a 4-1 basis.

Rarely is there a chance to do so much good with a relatively modest investment. And rarely has there been a better chance to inject more equity into the local educational system. The school district deserves credit for its innovation, and the community should give the program its wholehearted support.