

## **2008 Leading Light Award**

Nominees for this award must have contributed to a program or project which has created an environment of positive change over a 3-5 year period in one or more of the following categories: Student Achievement, School-Community Connections, Education Advocacy and Career and Technical Education.

This year's winner has been influential in three of the four categories. They also have created a model program that can be replicated statewide. I'm pleased to announce that the recipient of the 2008 Leading Light Award is the Winter Park Health Foundation, nominated by Orange County Public Schools.

It has been proven that consistent school attendance results in improved student achievement. The partnership between the Winter Park Health Foundation and Orange County Public Schools has proven that statement to be true.

For more than a decade, the WPHF has worked closely with OCPS in developing and launching free school-based health and wellness programs designed to help students become as healthy and academically productive as possible. The programs serve Winter Park High School and its 11 elementary and middle feeder schools and reach more than 12,000 students and their families.

These programs include the Healthy School Teams, the CHILL counseling program, the School Nursing Initiative, and Student Health Centers. They are based on the belief that *Healthy Kids Make Better Students and Better Students Make Healthy Communities*.

As a result of this unique partnership, students are able to return to class faster and they are performing better academically. In addition, there is a new emphasis on healthy foods and activities in schools as a result of the work of the Healthy School Teams.

Made up of school staff, administrators, parents and even students, these teams plan programs for their schools that promote healthy lifestyles and behaviors. Because of their success, they now serve as a model for all of the other public schools in Orange County.

Under the CHILL counseling program, free mental health counseling is provided to students and their families. These mental health professionals are school-based and hold individual and group sessions with students.

With the School Nursing Initiative, WPHF provides financial support so schools can upgrade from a basic school health aide to a full-time, licensed practical or registered nurse in school clinics.

There are also two Student Health Centers serving students attending Winter Park area schools, and both are financially supported by WPHF. The centers are staffed by nurse practitioners who are able to provide more advanced health care services, including school and sports

physicals and writing prescriptions. School nurses and CHILL counselors also refer students to the Student Health Centers for extra care.

Results of the partnership between WPHF and OCPS show that “healthy kids do make better students.” Ten of the 12 schools earned A grades this year, and 11 have been consistent high performers (earning either A or B grades) for the past five years. The 12 schools also had an average attendance rate for the past three years of 95.1 percent, slightly higher than the district average.

Last year students who attended schools with nurses were 16 percent more likely to return to school after illness or an accident than those in schools without nurses. The return-to-class rate for students who accessed either of the two Student Health Centers was 93 percent. In addition, recent evaluation results show that students who are exposed to CHILL practices, whether it is in individual or group counseling or as part of a classroom activity, seem to be better test takers and they score higher on FCAT.

WPHF has invested nearly \$11 million in support of its school-based health programs since 2000, but its support goes well beyond financial investment. Representatives of the Foundation are dedicated to the promotion of school health and wellness within the school district and throughout the community.

The mission of the WPHF is to help students stay healthy and perform at their best. We at SUNSPRA salute their efforts to enhance education by increasing student achievement, developing connections between school and community, and serving as an advocate for public education. It is now my pleasure to present the 2008 Leading Light Award to Patricia Maddox, President and CEO of the Winter Park Health Foundation, and to Debbie Watson, Vice President.