Gwinnett County Public Schools earns $3.7 million grant from The Broad Foundation to support leadership development

Gwinnett County Public Schools launched a new initiative this past year, the Quality-Plus Leader Academy. This local initiative, which grew from the Superintendent’s vision for succession planning, is at the heart of a grant request the school system made to the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation. Acknowledging the strength of the current Quality-Plus Leader Academy curriculum and structure and the system’s leadership mentoring program, the Broad Foundation has committed to help fund the development of future leaders in Gwinnett County. The base amount of the grant is $3.5 million, and when coupled with funding for contingencies, the total grant amount exceeds $3.7 million.

The Broad Foundation seeks to dramatically improve urban K-12 public education through better governance, management, labor relations, and competition. Currently, the Broad Foundation is investing in several areas, including developing a K-12 leadership pipeline, developing high-performing systems and tools, and changing the operating environment for K-12 public education. The Broad Foundation strongly believes that successful transformation of complex organizations must begin with a great leader in place. As a result, the Foundation supports efforts, like those found in Gwinnett County Public Schools, to recruit, select, develop, and retain the next generation of principals and system leaders.

CEO/Superintendent J. Alvin Wilbanks agrees with the Broads that everything rises and falls on leadership. He explains, “Scientific research has proven that the effect of the school principal on student achievement is great. That said, it is our responsibility to ensure that our school leaders possess the knowledge, skills, and talent to lead a 21st century school where the focus is on teaching and learning. The path to the principalship must be clear, directed, and full of rich experiences that prepare, inspire, and reward those up to the challenge.”

-more-
Gwinnett County Public Schools’ principal preparation program is a multi-stage process that focuses on leader development, recruitment, selection, training, placement, ongoing support, and evaluation. With increases in student enrollment, the construction of new schools, and normal attrition, the school system projects a great need for additional principals and assistant principals. District succession planning reveals the need for 100 new principals and 400 new assistant principals by 2012. The Quality-Plus Leader Academy was developed and will be expanded with the help of this grant in order to satisfy the demand for high-quality principals.

“We know this is the right thing to do and we are committed to doing it the right way,” says Dr. Glenn Pethel, executive director of Leadership Development. “We have been very fortunate in Gwinnett that we have been able to attract, develop, and retain good leaders. However, there is a great demand and competition for those leaders and for those who aspire to leadership positions. The support of the Broad Foundation will allow us to provide future leaders with a more comprehensive preparation program.”

The Broad Foundation grant will allow GCPS to expand its program to develop aspiring principals to include:

- **A diagnostic assessment of a leader’s skills** prior to selection to the Quality-Plus Leader Academy.

- **A practicum that provides a true residency period prior to a leadership appointment**, much like what is found in the medical profession. This practical experience will take place over three 20-day periods. Grant funds will provide a substitute to the participant’s school to diminish disruptions for the school and its students.

- **Expansion of the system’s mentoring program** from three mentors to nine. Leader mentors are selected based on depth and quality of experience and a proven track-record as high performing principals. They create a supportive, non-evaluative relationship with new leaders, sharing their knowledge, experiences, and insight.

Gwinnett County Public Schools will receive grant disbursements through 2011 that will help develop and fund these program enhancements. The school system will regularly report to the Foundation its progress, and make adjustments to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of the program.