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SUNY sending tutors to MLK center

By DAN ISRAELI

The Long Beach Martin Luther King (MLK) Center is recruiting students from local colleges to serve as tutors for children in the after-school programs. Currently, the center has signed on with SUNY College at Old Westbury, which has five of its students tutoring at MLK for the spring semester.

"It's all part of revamping our after-school programs," said Thomas Owens, the executive director of the MLK center. Since becoming director six months ago, Owens said he has pushed the idea of placing more emphasis on education in the center's programs. The educational initiative is part of a greater strategic plan developed by the board of directors and Owens, for the total growth and sustainability of the agency.

To bolster these efforts, five Long Beach school district teachers have signed on to train the college tutors in the curriculum. This will give the tutors a better understanding of the material the kids are learning, since a majority of the students who use the MLK center attend district schools.

Dr. Mary Tatem, the district's director of special education and pupil personnel services, has been heavily involved in the tutoring program. While the district teachers are scheduled to hold a training workshop with the college tutors on April 28, the plan is to keep a line of communication open all year long, to better instill the curriculum and note progress. "It is something



THOMAS OWENS, CENTER, executive director of the Long Beach Martin Luther King Jr. Center, with SUNY Old Westbury President Calvin O. Butts III and MLK Center Trustee James Hodge.

I am really happy about, especially for the communication it creates," Tatem said. "The more our teachers become involved outside of the classroom, the better off our children will be."

Owens, who noted that the center also provides kids with a variety of recreational activities after school, is hoping that the college tutors can divert some of that attention to homework and studying. "The question we pose ourselves with is, Are these kids learning anything?" Owens said. "The pur-

pose of having these tutors is to make sure everything we do with education complements the school's curriculum."

The tutoring program was a perfect fit for Old Westbury, which recently introduced its new Community Engagement and Partnership Center. The center launched its First Year Experience Student Engagement program for the spring semester, placing 80 students of the college's freshman class in community service position with area not-for-profits. Five of those 80 students are the

tutors currently volunteering at the MLK center.

For Laura Anker, director of the Community Engagement and Partnership Center, the program has been very beneficial for her students. "Our students are gaining a greater understanding of responsibility," Anker said. "They are getting as much from this as the kids they're assisting at the MLK center."

Anker noted how critical afterschool programs like the ones at MLK are to the community, and hoped her students could gain that sense of connection. "It's also giving them an opportunity to explore career opportunities, working with kids," Anker said. "In addition, many of our students are first-generation college students, and can act as wonderful role models to the kids."

Now that the partnership with Old Westbury is underway, Owens said he plans to build on the foundation of the tutoring program with other local colleges. He mentioned Malloy, Hofstra, Nassau Community and Adelphi as possible candidates.

The collaboration between all three entities, not-for-profit, school district and college has been rewarding for all. "Everyone has been fantastic," Owens said. "The school district wanted for this to happen as much as we did. That's why the partnership is so important."

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