



# CIS Palm Beach County News

## **Youth Empowerment Symposium to Facilitate Student Input for Closing Graduation Rate Gaps. Communities in Schools engages volunteer mentors from area businesses.**

When Communities in Schools of Palm Beach County (CISPBC) Executive Director Margaret Bagley got involved with the Superintendent's Task Force to Increase Graduation and Decrease Suspensions, she had a pretty good idea of what she wanted to accomplish. While the overall plan development of the Task Force continues—Ms. Bagley's vision of a youth empowerment initiative is well underway. A Youth Empowerment Symposium is set for Saturday, April 9, from 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. at Forest Hill High School which will jump-start an effort to "grow" and develop a network of teen peer mentors across the district.

Set in a format similar to the Superintendent's Leadership Summit for district administrators, over 300 student participants will first hear a presentation from Acting Superintendent Bill Malone. Later, the students and principals from the selected 16 high schools will attend breakout sessions set in a Town Hall format which will facilitate the opportunity for them to express their perceptions of the cause of the graduation rate gaps and alarming suspension rates. Ms. Bagley said the students are excited at the prospect of having their voices heard. "They are motivated and committed to assisting their fellow students with staying in school—they realize the importance of peer mentoring in assisting another person to achieve in life," she stated. After completing eight (8) thirty-minute sessions of training, these students will become peer mentors to students who are referred by either the School-Based Team or a school guidance process which has been established by the school's administration. Generally, students who are identified as "at risk of attrition" will be referred to the peer-to-peer mentors program as an early intervention step. As peer-to-peer trained mentors graduate, incoming ninth graders will be trained in the strategies by CISPBC staff and volunteers.

Students get the chance to earn up to 75 hours of community service as documented by their Community Service logs and these hours may be used to meet requirement for graduation. Many of the business volunteers who have been trained as mentors have been recruited and trained by CISPBC staff.

This community-organization led initiative is a stellar example of the District Board policy that emphasizes a need for parent and community partnerships with schools to optimize student achievement and decrease dropouts. For more information about the Superintendent's Task Force to Improve High School Graduation and Decrease Suspensions, contact Dr. Gloria Crutchfield, 561-434-8714 or email [crutch@palmbeach.k12.fl](mailto:crutch@palmbeach.k12.fl) . For details about the Youth Empowerment Symposium, contact Ms. Bagley, 561- 471-9681 or email [mbagley@cispsc.org](mailto:mbagley@cispsc.org)