CHICAGO SUN-TIMES.com

CPS expands math, sports mentoring program for troubled teens

MON, 07/21/2014 - 2:17PM

FRAN SPIELMAN AND LAUREN FITZPATRICK



Mayor Rahm Emanuel announces new investments in mentoring, after-school and summer programs at Harper High School, 6520 S. Wood St., last year. He was greeted by Marcus Norris, 16, and other members of Becoming A Man, a program for at-risk youths. | Sun-Times file photo

The Chicago Public Schools will expand a sports-based mentoring program for troubled teens to 2,000 students at 37 schools and add “math tutoring on steroids” to three more schools.

The expansion will be made possible by a $10 million infusion of federal funds authorized by President Barack Obama that couldn’t come at a more opportune time.

It follows another violent summer weekend, during which nearly two dozen people were shot over a 12-hour period.

Eleven-year-old Shamiya Adams was among the innocent victims. She was shot in the head during a sleepover when a stray bullet tore through a friend’s home in West Garfield Park.

The $10 million from Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative allows CPS to expand two programs for at-risk youths that have grabbed the White House's attention: the Becoming a Man sports mentoring and "cognitive behavioral therapy" program and Match Education, which uses intensive, one-on-one tutoring to dramatically improve math skills.

Beginning in September, BAM will serve 2,000 students in 37 schools, up from about 1,750, according to Rebecca Clarkin of Youth Guidance. Match Education will be added to three high schools, bringing projected totals to 1,100 students at 15 schools, a CPS spokesman said.

"Through this investment, BAM and Match, which have grown substantially in just a few years, will be providing thousands of Chicago's children with high-quality educational experience, an alternative to the street and the opportunity for a bright future that every child deserves," Emanuel said in a news release.

Roughly $4 million of the federal funding infusion will come from Title I funding made possible by a recently approved Illinois waiver of the No Child Left Behind Act. The remaining $6 million will come from a National Institutes of Health grant, which also allows the University of Chicago to study the impact of the companion programs and their expansion to other cities.

Earlier this year, Emanuel used $2.5 million in corporate and foundation grants to deliver on his promise to expand the promising programs to 1,000 students.

At the time, the mayor touted an amazing turnaround for participating students who started anywhere from four to seven years behind grade level.

In just eight months, 106 participating freshmen and sophomores at Harper High School learned in math what the average American high school student takes three years to learn, according to a report published by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

The students were chronic absentees on track to become dropouts, having missed an average of five weeks of school. They were in the 22nd percentile in math test scores the previous school year.

But with an hour of remedial work each day during the 2012-13 school year, with tutors working with no more than two students at a time, they managed to close more than half of the average gap in math test scores between white and black students, the study showed.

They also flunked two fewer courses than students who did not participate. Their likelihood of being "on track" for graduation rose by nearly one-half.

"We have been led to believe that teenaged boys — particularly teenaged boys of color — by the time they get to high school, it may be too late," Tim Knowles of the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute said during a roundtable discussion with Emanuel and stakeholders on that day.

"If I was to rebrand the story here, I would call it simply, 'It's not too late,' which is very, very powerful for the city of Chicago," he said.

Emanuel responded by saying he was so thrilled with the results in cracking what he called the "hardest nut of urban education," he was determined to expand the program to 1,000 students and beyond.

“You never have to give up on kids. You may have to figure out a different way of doing it. But what this shows is, don’t ever throw the towel in on the kids. If you figure out another way to speak to them [and] educate them to who they are, you can get them to graduation day,” the mayor said then.

“We’re going to get to 1,000 and, if it stays promising, we’re going to keep growing this so we can reach all of these kids who are at risk. The hardest population: young men of color. Get ’em to graduation day [and] out of trouble.”

If future studies produced similar results in closing 60 percent of the racial divide in math, the mayor said he would have “a case” to appeal to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, a former Chicago Schools CEO, to “reprogram federal education funds for an even bigger expansion, instead of asking foundations to bankroll it.

“The reason I talked to all of the foundations when we met at McCormick Place was, ‘Get us up to a level where they won’t see this as an aberration, but it’s consistent two years in a row with a wide spectrum of kids, then say, ‘We’d like to reprogram these federal dollars.’ You don’t need more money. You just need the money spent smartly,” the mayor said then.