An Edu-Plex of Dedication and Innovation

“Magnet schools are so popular with parents that the idea of not sustaining the magnet program past the MSAP grant is inconceivable,” comments Helen Blanch, Assistant Superintendent of School Choice at Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) and new Technical Working Group (TWG) member. A long-term vision, centralized efforts and community partnerships, augmented by a fierce school-choice-advocate superintendent, are the key components to sustaining magnet programs beyond the district’s initial MSAP funding. Having worked within the fourth-largest school district in the nation for nearly 28 years, Blanch is happy to report that all 23 formerly MSAP-funded schools in MDCPS are thriving and continue to receive monetary support from the district.

One good example is Miami Edison Senior High School. Opened in the 2001 MSAP grant cycle, this nursing-them school soon realized that a magnet program focused on diverse cultures and languages would better serve its recently immigrated Haitian population. So, Miami Edison revised its magnet theme to international languages. What’s more, the school now has a state grade of “C” after receiving an “F” for 5 consecutive years. In addition to international languages, the school has become a thriving “Edu-Plex,” offering courses in culinary arts, entrepreneurship, finance, and health and public affairs.

Blanch attributes both school and district success in sustaining magnet programs to the district’s overall commitment to magnet schools. She explains, “It’s very challenging to start what people may consider an expensive program during such tight budget years. But, if you take the long view, it’s a good investment for each school district.” She also emphasizes the importance of viewing MSAP money as seed money for a long-term plan. “The starting up of the magnet program is really the most expensive part, but if it’s done right, you build the sustainability in while you have the grant dollars. You can’t build a new magnet with a 3-year view; you really need 10 years. After 10 years, you can truly say you’ve changed the culture of the school…”

Magnet Moments

The Technical Working Group

The MSAP Center is pleased to introduce its Technical Working Group (TWG). This group comprises 11 outstanding leaders in the education field and the magnet schools community. These leaders will draw upon their collective experience with and knowledge of magnet schools to advise the U.S. Department of Education and the MSAP Center on ways to improve technical assistance to MSAP grantees and magnet programs.

The TWG members are as follows:
Helen Blanch, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Florida
Joshua P. Bogin, Springfield Public Schools, Massachusetts
Michelle L Bonton, The Rhodes School, Texas
Robert G. Brooks, Magnet Schools of America
Velma L. Cobb, Equity Assistance Center Region II
Deidra K. Honeywell, DKH Consulting Services Inc.
Pansy D. Houghton, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida
David Kikoler, American Education Solutions Inc.
Charles I. Rankin, Equity Assistance Center Region VII
Claire E. Smrekar, National Center on School Choice