

Letters to the Editor

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Business leaders can help students

On April 20 more than 600 business and civic leaders will go to Chicago public schools as "Principals for a Day" with organizers hoping for one-day principals to develop long-term relationships with individual schools.

We invite these CEOs to go a step further and develop strategic visions that link their companies, customers and employees with schools and neighborhood after-school programs.

Such an adopt-a-neighborhood strategy would enable more corporate volunteers to become involved with schoolchildren, because of opportunities to serve in nonschool time frames, after work, or on weekends, and in leadership and infrastructure roles. Such a strategy would enable a reverse flow of kids to business sites, where they could use state-of-the-art computers and be mentored by people who use these technologies in their work.

To be even bolder, we invite each of these civic leaders to outline their company's long-term "school-to-a-job-at-their-company" strategy for helping kids within a one-mile radius of where these

companies do business, or where their employees live, or where they may be making contributions.

Finally, we invite leaders to appoint people to lead these efforts, and to use resources such as the April 30-May 1 Tutor/Mentor Leadership Conference or the Tutor/Mentor Connection Web site at www.tutormentorconnection.org, in developing or updating corporate commitments to the education of at-risk children.

At a late March gathering of the Illinois Business Leaders Roundtable, a challenge was issued to state school Supt. Glenn McGee to help the Illinois business community stay economically competitive by improving public education. I'd like to reverse this challenge, asking business leaders who serve as principals for a day to develop innovative, comprehensive and long-term strategies, reaching kids during the schoolday and the non-school hours, to pull children through school and into careers, while the rest of us use our resources to push these kids along.

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Voice of the people

Tutor/mentor programs need you

CHICAGO—Let's start putting accountability on the other stakeholders in this city and region and stop blaming the schools for all that's wrong with education.

While the Tribune spent a year writing about Von Humboldt School's struggle to educate its children, it hasn't shown enough of the connection between poor schools and poverty, which is a significant contributing factor. It has yet to print a map with an overlay showing the location of the Chicago schools on probation and high-poverty neighborhoods—or of businesses, hospitals and universities in these same areas that could take a greater share of responsibility for preparing kids to succeed.

Von Humboldt is one of 10 probation schools in one neighborhood on Chicago's Near West Side. Poverty is high. Children in this area haven't grown up with a wide variety of adults going to work every day—with careers ranging from lawyers and doctors to engineers, teachers and stockbrokers. Many haven't had community and family momentum setting an example and an expectation that each child will go to school and go into a job or career that has been modeled to him or her since birth.

Yet this is an environment that after-school tutoring and mentoring programs can create. They can be safe places where adults and children can meet for play or learning. Research of Big Brothers/Big Sisters shows that well-conducted mentoring programs can significantly boost school retention and performance. The Quantum Opportunities Project shows that a program that sticks tenaciously with youngsters from welfare families through the high school years can have strong positive effects on their graduation and college attendance rates.

There are several after-school programs in the Von Humboldt area. There are also a variety of businesses, hospitals and churches that could be meeting sites for additional programs that could be structured to meet the high standards set by Big Brothers and the Quantum Opportunities Project. Any group of business and professional people could be a team of mentors, tutors, leaders and fundraisers for any of these after-school programs.

This is a time for every business, civic, alumni, religious and professional group in Chicago to make a new connection to a tutor/mentor program, with a team of adults, with dollars and with business skills and equipment that can make the non-school hours a time that prepares every child to go to school each day better prepared to learn. This is not a time to point fingers at poor schools. This is a time to say, how can I help?

How do you find these programs? Volunteer fairs will be held at a variety of locations on Friday through Sunday in which program leaders will be available to answer questions and sign up volunteers. The Chicago Public Schools 10,000 Tutors project will also be represented.

Tutor/mentor directories are available at every library, the Chicago Bar Foundation and at the United Way/Crusade of Mercy. Many programs are listed on cable TV through the month of September. If you would like a directory for your company, church or organization, call the Tutor/Mentor Connection at 312-467-2889 (Email: CabriniC@aol.com). Let's go save our children!

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Chicago delegate, President's Summit for America's Future