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City Schools' Family Support Center Links Students, Families And Community

BY WENDY PEAY
UNITED WAY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Greenville City Schools' Family Support Center serves as a link between school, students and their families by working to improve the potential for the students' educational success.

United Way funds provide a portion of the finances needed to maintain Family Support Center services to students at Tusculum View, Hal Henard, Highland and EastView elementary schools, Greenville Middle School and Greenville High School.

United Way of Greene County will provide \$6,000 to the Family Support Center in 2018. The activities provided fall under the main headings of family and community engagement, direct services, referrals and linkage to services to meet adverse needs of the student and family, student attendance and truancy services.

Activities include, but are not limited to: serving as liaison between school and family; conducting home visits to speak to families about issues such as truancy, emotional needs, homelessness and housing situations; available community services; making parental contacts to assist with clothing, hygiene and medical needs; linking parents to support and



Greenville City Schools' Family Support Center distributed food, backpacks and other necessities to thousands of students over the past year. PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN

educational meetings and workshops that address a variety of issues and concerns that affect families; providing opportunities for community and parent involvement through volunteering; and collaborating and partnering

with community agencies to provide other needed services. According to FSC Director Bill Muhlhahn, a few of the special services also provided by the Family Support Center include:

- FSC Food Panty — The

Family Support Center is working with Feeding America and Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee and churches to create a school-based food pantry. "Child Hunger Corp. has found that the greatest need for more

child hunger programs lies outside the immediate Tri-Cities area in the more rural parts of Northeast Tennessee," Muhlhahn said. "The FSC will be the first site of its kind in this area. Continued funding for this portion of the pro-

gram is limited."

- Truancy Prevention — In order for students to be successful, good attendance at school is important. "Unfortunately, some students and families do not understand the need to be in school on a consistent basis," Muhlhahn said. "The truancy prevention program ... has encouraged students who might not otherwise have graduated from high school."

- Student Behaviorist — "We are seeing more and more students coming to school with severe behavior issues," the director said. "Many of these children may have the intellectual capacity to do well in school, but their behaviors are blocking their ability to learn."

- Student Counseling — Muhlhahn said he has specialized training in analyzing children's behavior and develops targeted programs to help children and families to better cope in the classroom and in the home. He counsels individually with students, parents and families.

"The City Schools Family Resource Center, like most organizations, is trying to do more with less," Muhlhahn said. "Funding and donations from the community allow the program to assist more students and their families and is often the key factor in the academic success of the students the FSC serves."

County Schools' Family Resource Center 'Bridging The Gap'

BY WENDY PEAY
UNITED WAY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The mission of the Greene County Schools Family Resource Center is to work in partnership with parents, community leaders, businesses, state and local service agencies, and public and private organizations to create a network of prevention and intervention programs that can effectively resolve the diverse problems facing children and their families.

"Education is the cornerstone of individual and community success, but students cannot be expected to meet rigorous curriculum if they don't have food, clothing and shelter," Director Alisha Ricker said. "Basic needs must be met to enable a student's educational success. Schools cannot do this alone."

"That is where the FRC comes in," she added. "Our FRC bridges the gap between home, school and community and strives to improve the numbers of students who enter school ready to succeed, read proficiently by third grade, successfully transition to middle school, and graduate high school on time."

The FRC is one of 104 across the state of Tennessee and is funded by a grant from the State of



Greene County Schools' Family Resource Center works to support students and their families in a variety of ways. PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Tennessee Department of Education with a match from the Greene County Board of Education and United Way of Greene County.

In 2003, the grant was provided to serve Chuckey, Doak, Camp Creek and West Pines elementary schools and Chuckey-Doak Middle School. With Unit-

ed Way of Greene County funding, the FRC began serving all sixteen schools in Greene County in 2013. United Way will provide \$13,000 to the Family Resource Center in 2018, with \$6,000 earmarked to increase the ability to make home visits throughout the county. The center is located

at Chuckey Elementary School and provides outreach to all Greene County Schools. There are 11 elementary schools, a middle school, and four high schools with approximately 7,000 students.

Countywide, approximately 70 percent of students qualify for free or reduced meals, Ricker noted. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students has risen over the past year. The FRC served 1,750 students last year.

"This grant and funding increase from United Way of Greene County has enabled our FRC to help make a difference in the lives of students who could be considered 'at risk' and their families," Ricker said. "The Family Resource Center provides assistance with basic needs to enable academic success and most indicators of student achievement have improved. With the additional United Way funds, we have increased students/families served, benefiting not only the Greene County School System, but the community at large by meeting the needs of each student so they are more likely to graduate and become productive citizens."

FRC seeks to address problems within the home and community environments that include poverty, hunger, homelessness,

abuse, neglect, poor health, mental illness, truancy, substance abuse and family conflict.

"Home visits to address these issues often lead to assistance and/or intervention with younger siblings to better prepare them to enter school," Ricker said. "During a recent home visit, we were able to provide basic needs and coordinate community services for a single parent of three school-age children and also provided assistance through community referral for speech for a younger child."

"Another home visit found a family living in a camper in a field with no running water, and our FRC was able to help secure housing for this single parent whose spouse had been incarcerated," Ricker added. "Another referral found a single parent family with three school-aged children sleeping in a car after eviction of their home, and we were able to locate temporary emergency housing."

The FRC has been able to provide resources, referral and support for these children to remain in school, Ricker noted.

In addition to providing direct assistance for families, the FRC also coordinates the countywide Food for Kids Backpack Program, which provides a

bag of healthy snacks and easily prepared foods for over 500 students weekly. This program is provided by Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast TN and John Deere Power Plant employees distribute the boxes to each school.

The FRC held Greene County Schools Back to School Bash last year to help ease the stress of students going back to school on families. Students received a backpack with school supplies, shoes, vision screenings, clothing vouchers, T-shirts and haircuts free of charge.

For more information about the FRC, call 257-2108, email alisha.ricker@gcstn.org or visit the FRC webpage from the Greene County Schools site and www.facebook.com/gcscfrc.

LeAnn Myers, principal of Chuckey Elementary School, stated, "We truly appreciate the work done by the Family Resource Center to meet the basic needs for our children and their families. We are so thankful for United Way. Their support makes it possible to serve many more families across the whole district."

David McLain, director of Greene County Schools, said he is "thankful for this program and the difference it makes for students and their families in Greene County."

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