

'Sky is the limit' with new dropout prevention program

By CHARIS ANDERSON

canderson@s-t.com

January 29, 2011 12:00 AM

NEW BEDFORD — NorthStar Learning Centers has launched a new dropout prevention program that will provide a range of educational and developmental services to a group of New Bedford High School students over the next four years.

The Quantum Opportunities Program, a partnership between NorthStar and the city's school system, is being funded through a grant from the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a D.C.-based nonprofit.

"The students in this program will be able to take control of their education," said Maria Rosario, executive director of NorthStar Learning Centers. "What we hope to do is create a sense of curiosity about learning ... but most of all what we hope to do is reduce the dropout rate. I refuse to believe it is an issue we cannot overcome."

Thirty freshman were selected to participate in the program from the more than 250 who expressed interest, according to Richard Carter, director of youth services at NorthStar.

Those 30 students will participate in about 250 hours of programming a year — including tutoring, field trips, mentoring, developmental activities and community service — for the next four years.

"The goal in Quantum is to see our youth succeed in school and in life," said Jenna Costa, the program's coordinator at NorthStar. "The sky is the limit with these students."

The program will use an online learning system, in combination with mentoring and tutoring, to help bring the student participants up to grade level and beyond, according to Dr. Alan Curtis, president and chief executive officer of the Eisenhower Foundation.

All participants will receive laptop computers on which the learning software will be loaded, according to Carter.

"It's a targeted, individualized approach," said School Superintendent Mary Louise Francis. "It brings additional service to our students ... but it also supports the district in our efforts to reduce the dropout rate."

Chastity Santiago, 14, said she wanted to participate in the program because she thought it would help her become the first person in her family to go to college.

"Quantum will help me succeed in life," she said.

Fifteen-year-old Thomas Desousa said the adults in the program were helping him study.

"I've been getting Bs and Cs instead of Ds and Fs, so I'm doing better," he said.

In a phone interview Thursday, Curtis said the foundation has supported Quantum programs in about 20

1/30/2011

'Sky is the limit' with new dropout preve...

locations around the country, including New Bedford.

"We try to identify what works and then we try to replicate what works," he said. "This program, Quantum, works. ... We have to do much more of this if we're going to address the real problems of the truly disadvantaged and the inner city."

undefined