

Become a PAL: Local groups and businesses wanted

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A new program that will begin this year in Montgomery County aims to help entire classrooms of students.

The program, called Partners Advancing Learning, or PAL, is in the beginning stages of creation and is a project being taken on by Jeff Perkins, community education director for Montgomery County Schools.

"When I started working here, it began to hit me," Perkins said. "For kids to excel themselves, it really needs to be a community effort."

And that's what PAL aims to provide. A PAL will consist of one church or civic organization and one business partnering together to sponsor a group of classes at a school to help alleviate barriers and limitations that prevent students from achieving academic excellence, Perkins said.

The PAL team would then get connected to a classroom group at a school, perhaps in the business/group's own area, and that PAL would serve those students socially and financially in situations where students are in need.

"A lot of times, there are barriers outside of school that prevent kids from doing well in school," Perkins said. "Lots of these kids don't have parental support. Who bridges that gap?"

The PAL program would

start as a pilot program at the elementary school level, where there are approximately six classes in each of the five grade levels.

"My vision would be for each grade at each school to have two PAL teams," Perkins said. "That means there would need to be 30 PAL teams in total or 30 churches and 30 businesses."

Essentially, each partner group in the PAL would have a point person who would be the contacts for the partnership. If the teacher in a classroom notices a social service need that exists, the teacher could then contact the Family Resource Youth Service Center to verify the need, and the FRYSC representative for the school would contact one or both of the contacts of the PAL team.

An example Perkins gave was a child whose electricity was shut off due to an unpaid bill.

"The two point persons then decide on a course of action to help alleviate this need," Perkins said. "They may be able to totally take care of the problem, a portion of it, or maybe none at all."

Perkins said he understands that many needs may not be able to be met due to budgetary restrictions, but hopes to get businesses, churches and other organizations on board for a maximum of \$500 per school year.

While the program is still in the planning stages, there are still a few issues to be worked through, Perkins said. But that's why he needs the input and support of businesses, civic groups and churches across the county to get the program off the ground and all of the kinks worked out, he said.

Perkins encourages commu-

nity members to become involved and to give back to the community.

"A lot of people may feel for these kids, but think, 'hey, it's not my problem,'" Perkins said. "But there are statistics out there that prove that these kids affect all of us."

Perkins noted students who dropout or teens who get pregnant are more likely to receive government assistance, which is paid for with taxpayer money. Those who don't graduate high school are also at a higher risk of incarceration, affecting not only the local crime rate, but the wallet of the taxpayer as well. Alleviating barriers in the child's home life that could hinder learning is a small step in the right direction of providing a positive outlook for the children of Montgomery County, Perkins said.

"The potential exists for hundreds of people to become more invested and take greater ownership in the school district," he said.

For more information on how you can become a PAL, contact Perkins at jeff.perkins@montgomery.kyschools.us or at 497-8761.

PALS — Community Education Director Jeff Perkins is pictured here with his new assistant, Toni Hunt. Perkins and Hunt are attempting to start a new program called Partners Advancing Learning (PAL) in the school district in which churches, businesses and civic organizations help sponsors classrooms at the elementary level to provide social services. "I am so thankful with all there is to do to have Toni as my assistant," Perkins said.