

MODEL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Educators team with local elementary school to boost success

AT MORT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, not far from the USF Tampa campus, student test scores and distribution of resources are not the only big concerns.

The school is also focused on empowering the surrounding community.

In August, Mort became a Community School, which allows it to provide resources for services such as housing and food to students and their families. The USF College of Education has become a partner in the project.

The Community School Model uses what has been learned through research to provide all of the services and opportunities to help a child grow, says Rebecca Burns, PhD, a professor in the College of Education and Mort's professor-in-residence.

"As teachers, they're working with the children to try and raise reading scores — but the children are coming to school hungry," says Burns, noting that 97 percent of Mort's 800 students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. "Their parents are working two or three jobs, and some of them are homeless. It's really hard to focus on reading when your stomach is growling all of the time."

The college's partnership with the school predates the newest initiative. In 2013 it created the Mort Teacher Leadership Academy, allowing Mort teachers to work toward a Teacher Leader Graduate Certificate on-site. Since the academy's creation, Mort has moved up from a state-graded F school in 2014 to nearly a C in 2015.



PHOTO: Mort Elementary School students will benefit from a partnership with USF's College of Education.

The innovative practices in the program have resulted in a collaborative research group comprised of Burns; Francesca Perrone, '10 and MA '12; Mort principal William Woodland Johnson III, '91; and Mort educators Amanda Bellas and Kristen Hodges. The group has been recognized with the Claudia A. Balach Teacher Research Award, which will be presented in April.

The academy program aims to cultivate leaders within the school, says Perrone, a participant who is pursuing an educational specialist degree at USF. It's exactly what she needed, she says, because it focuses on what teachers need in the classroom and provides the information to support that need.

"When teachers are learning new practices constantly, they're going to want to implement them in the classroom" says Perrone. "It's all a part of action research ... and it shows the students that teachers never stop learning, too."

— ELIZABETH ENGASSER '15 | USF

GRANT TO PUT LIVING HISTORY IN CHILDREN'S HANDS

College of Education professors Michael and Ilene Berson received a Library of Congress grant to continue a project that explores using the library's historical documents to teach young students in Puerto Rico and Florida.

Student teachers at USF and the Universidad de Puerto Rico will learn how to identify developmentally appropriate materials for children, such as old photographs, and how to use them to enrich learning. The goal is to help students of Puerto Rican descent understand and appreciate the territory's historical and cultural traditions and its relationship with the United States.

The grant from the library's Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Regional Program will fund the 18-month project, called Teaching with Culturally Specific Primary Sources in Puerto Rico and Florida to Build Social Capital among Preservice Teachers.

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