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After-school programs get big boost

By Sandra T. Molina, Staff Writer

Area school districts' after-school programs got a shot in the arm recently when after-school provider "THINK Together" received a \$100,000 grant.

The money from the Peter and Virginia Ueberroth Family Foundation will help expand THINK's services.

THINK Together, based in Santa Ana, is a nonprofit provider operating at more than 180 sites in school districts throughout Orange, Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

They have contracts with Little Lake School District, Los Nietos Unified School District, Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District and South Whittier School District to provide academic enrichment, homework assistance, dynamic physical activities and nutrition education.

"This will help us build a regional system of support for over 30,000 educationally at-risk students across a four-county region of Southern California," said THINK founder and CEO Randy Barth.

The money from the foundation, said THINK spokesman Larry Tenney, covers the 33 percent districts must pay in matching funds of Prop. 49 money the districts receive. They receive \$87,000 for elementary schools and \$124,000 for middle schools.

In 2002, California voters approved the \$550million After School Education And Safety Program Act, which increased state grant funds available for before- and after-school programs providing tutoring, homework assistance and educational enrichment.

"We've been pleased, overall, with the programs provided by THINK," said Phillip Perez, superintendent of Little Lake School District.

About 200 Little Lake elementary and middle school students participate in the after-school program.

Officials from the Norwalk-La Mirada School District are also satisfied with services from THINK.

"Our parents love the after-school program," said Rosa Carreon, director of federal and state programs for Norwalk-La Mirada.

Almost 1,000 of its students partake in the after-school curriculum.

Although no hard data has been verified, Carreon said there is an improvement in students' academic performance.

"In general, we have seen improvement in both homework assignments and the day-to-day classroom assignments," she said.

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