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Area after-school program lands Ueberroth Foundation grant

By Daniel Fritz, Staff Writer

One of the largest providers of after-school programs in California just got a financial boost.

THINK Together, a nonprofit organization, recently received \$100,000 from the Peter & Virginia Ueberroth Family Foundation to assist with the expansion of THINK Together's elementary-level after-school programs throughout a four-county region of Southern California.

The organization currently provides educational services at school sites in 19 communities throughout Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

THINK Together operates on a combination of public and private funds. Under Proposition 49, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's \$400 million initiative to fund after-school programs, the organization receives \$20 million a year from the state. An additional \$4.5 million comes from private donations, such as the Ueberroth grant.

School districts in partnership with THINK Together also help pay for staffing, and provide the facilities and maintenance on which the program operates.

About 100 students per school are enrolled in the three-hour after-school program, which operates 180 days per year.

Most school's staffing consists of five site coordinators, or teachers, and one area supervisor that oversees multiple schools, usually within the same district. Each site coordinator is in charge of a class of 20 students between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m. Students are typically chosen by school administrators based on academic or socioeconomic need.

Christine Dennis, assistant superintendent with the Baldwin Park School District, said most kids chosen for the program are C and B students, special education and English language learners. "We look at proficiency for standards, and have a wide variety of students that use the program," she said.

Katherine Vazquez, an area supervisor with THINK Together who oversees 11 schools within the Baldwin Park school district, said that the program consists of three components: homework, enrichment and physical activity.

"I think the enrichment component reinforces what they're doing during school hours. A lot of the students that we work with need an extra little push," Vazquez said. "Also having an area supervisor and site coordinator there to give initial tutoring definitely makes a difference in increasing students' understanding and getting their homework done."

A portion of the THINK Together curriculum also includes elements of the high school exit exam, which are reduced to an elementary school level.

According to Christine Simmons, principal at Foster Elementary School in Baldwin Park, the program is popular among students.

"I have a long waiting list of kids who want to be in the program because there's not much turn-around," Simmons said. "The kids like it and really have fun."

THINK Together and the Ueberroth Family Foundation has had a partnership since 2001, and Randy Barth, founder and CEO of THINK Together, said each year the foundation has continued to increase IT support of the organization.

Last year, the Ueberroth Family Foundation granted \$1.32 million to 75 nonprofit agencies. The foundation focuses efforts on community based groups that promote social change.

"This generous gift will allow THINK Together to continue to improve our program quality, as well as build infrastructure and organizational capacity," Barth said.

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