

Quantum opportunities celebrates one year of students' successes



The young people pictured here are Quantum Associates, many of whom went from having discipline challenges and poor grades to winning prizes, making honor roll, and doing community service. They are flanked by Councilman Wengay Newton and Emmet Folgert, CCEJ Board Member, on the left, and by Dr. Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich (seated), and the Quantum Associates Staff Coordinator Tyrone Thompson.

The Quantum Opportunities program for high school students, was formally introduced to St. Petersburg recently. The program's sponsor, the Center for Community & Economic Justice, Inc., (CCEJ) filled its auditorium at 2734 Central Avenue with elected officials, County leaders and the families of the students called "Quantum Associates," to applaud Quantum's success as the only Florida location of 14 such programs nationwide.

Funded by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation through a four-year grant by the US Department of Justice, Quantum is providing academic support, cultural enrichment and civic leadership experiences to 30 students from Gibbs and St. Petersburg High for their four years there. The Quantum Associates are now in their sophomore year.

While many come to Florida to retire, Dr. Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich, a former Philadelphia deputy mayor, professor and executive director of a US president's urban policy initiative, has made St. Petersburg her home to pioneer Quantum. The program is housed in donated space in a building owned by Scruggs-Leftwich and her husband, the noted community development expert, civic leader and ABC TV'S *Freedom Hero*, Rev. Edward Leftwich, CCEJ's president.

Youth in urban environments often fall victim to social ills such as illiteracy, unemployment, gang activity, drugs and other destructive behaviors. Quantum counters these challenges with holistic support. The intensive, year-round, intervention motivates and prepares urban teens during their high school years to graduate and in many cases go on to college. Youth are paired with mentors who provide a steady hand through often tumultuous years.

"Through these initiatives we provide youth with safe havens and programs that will help them work through problems that can lead to teen pregnancy, crime and poverty," says Dr. Alan Curtis, President of Eisenhower. "This investment in human potential will ultimately build our economy."

"The national dialogue is focused on the 2012 elections. We are reminding America that our country has just about the highest poverty and crime rates in the industrialized world," said Dr. Curtis. "Yet we know that investing in human potential and job creation is what will get us out of this recession. We have proven successes like Quantum. Our national dialogue should be about how to move political will to replicate what works on a scale equal to the dimensions of the problem."

Dr. Scruggs-Leftwich is energized by the accomplishments of the Quantum Associates. "One of our Associates has entered the St. Petersburg Collegiate High School and is taking her Gibbs High courses along with college courses. Others have gone from citations for class truancy to almost all-A report cards. Our talented thespians are interning with theaters. Associates who were struggling in school now perform in the most demanding courses. They've won prizes both in Tech Bowl and Brain Bowl competitions. We are building citizen leaders here."

Based on scientific evaluation, Quantum participants:

- + Graduated from high school more often (63 vs. 42%).
- + Dropped out of school less often -- (23 vs. 50%).
- + Entered postsecondary education more (42 vs. 16%).
- + Experienced teen pregnancy less often (24 vs. 38%). ■