

## Law firm begins its school partnership the write way – with 2,400 No. 2 pencils

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WEST PALM BEACH —The principal at U.B. Kinsey/Palmview Elementary School was pleasantly surprised when a lawyer sent a gift for her students: 2,400 No. 2 pencils.

After all, she had only mentioned in passing that the school was always in need of pencils.

Donated by the law firm of Lesser, Lesser, Landy & Greene, the pencils are among the first fruits of a new program called Challenging the Future, a school volunteer initiative

launched by the law firm, the city and a business coalition.

The law firm and other businesses plan to provide tutoring, field trips and donations to encourage student achievement.

Mentoring students is a big objective.

"It will help to build self-esteem as well as academic skills because one-on-one mentors can make a big difference in a child's life," said Helen Byrd, U.B. Kinsey's principal. "It is very effective, and I think we're going to have great results with the partnership at the end



UMA SANGHVI/Staff Photographer

Ernest Philmore, 4 of West Palm Beach, accepts a hot dog from attorney Gary Lesser at U.B. Kinsey/Palmview Elementary. Lesser's law firm, with other businesses, wants to encourage students.

## Lawyers will team up with children and mentor them for seven months

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of the school year.

Every 12 weeks, the Lesser law firm is sponsoring FCAT study parties, dubbed Academic Achievement Encouragement events. Students pack on hot dogs and potato chips before packing the books for one-hour study sessions. Byrd estimates 100 parents and students showed up at the firm's first study party on Nov. 17.

"It was very successful and very needed," she said. "All the parents wanted to meet the sponsors. They were appreciative and very thankful."

Attorney Gary Lesser said he learned of the school from Rene Silber, the city's new education coordinator.

He got involved after learning that 70 percent of the children at U.B. Kinsey, a magnet school for children gifted in the arts, are from poor families and qualify for free or subsidized school lunches.

The school has a B grade from the state, but getting there hasn't been easy. A few years ago, the school was rated a D.

"We felt it was the perfect school because the children were doing well, but there's still a lot of need there, especially for supplies," Lesser said.

Lesser said he asked members of his firm if they would mentor students at the school. Ten went through two-hour certification classes required by the school board. They will be paired with students early next year and work with them for seven months.

Silber said the city made a commitment to enhancing education in April, when she was hired as the education coordinator.

Since then, the city has organized several new partnership programs, such as Principal for a Day, in which 19 businesses teamed with principals to discuss school needs and public education, and to stimulate

partnerships.

The program had its first run last week.

"There's so much potential if we're creative and think out of the box a little bit," Silber said. "These businesses have skills that they can bring to the table."

Participating businesses include restaurant purveyor Cheney Brothers, which is providing food and other items at FCAT parties, NozNewz Communications, Target Media Group, Ko-Mar Productions and WRMF-FM 97.9.

Don't be surprised if U.B. Kinsey students pop up on television or the radio. As part of the Challenging the Future program, students will be taught to write radio and television scripts. The students will produce their own public service announcements.

Lesser has made another promise to the school: His firm will raise or contribute \$7,000 to send the school orchestra to Atlanta to compete in a national competition.

"It didn't seem right to tell kids to express themselves and then say, 'I'm sorry, but you can't go to the tournament because of a money shortage,'" Lesser said. "It can make a big difference in their lives."

This is the first time, Byrd said, that the orchestra has been invited to a national competition.

"The children are fund-raising, but it is an expensive endeavor and we don't know how they're going to come out," the principal said. "We were delighted when he said that he would do that."

Lesser hopes the program will bring hope to U.B. Kinsey students — "pure and simple."

"They're great kids, and they need to know there's hope for their future," the lawyer said. "It's a sad thing that some kids don't have any hope. They need to know that businesses and people care."

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