



## The Westview Partnership

The Westview partnership originated in 1992 as a cooperative project of the Toronto District School Board's Westview family of schools and York University's Faculty of Education. The Partnership has expanded to include the original partners as well as the York University Faculty Association, Seneca College, Toronto Catholic District School Board, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and a number of private donors. The project operates in twenty three schools in Jane & Finch community and offers programs and activities designed to promote equity in public education through increasing access to post secondary opportunities for first generation students living in the university neighbourhood.

The programs are divided into two streams: the first stream targets Bachelor of Education teacher candidates who are working toward becoming teachers. Education students volunteer for placements in community organizations during their first year of their B.Ed. program. In second and third years, they may choose a practicum placement in a Westview school. Along with their practical experience they are encouraged to take a full year course in Urban Education.

The second stream targets students from Junior Kindergarten to beyond grade 12, encouraging and supporting them to pursue post secondary education or training. To this end the Partnership operates or collaborates in 11 major programs. For example, the *Advanced Credit Experience Program (ACE)* provides a post-secondary education experience to high school students from a diversity of ethnic, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a supportive environment. They gain exposure to higher education and experience some of the benefits of choosing to pursue their education beyond high school. The *York/Seneca Summer Science and Technology Program (YSSSTP)* is meant to increase students' interest in and enthusiasm for the disciplines of science and technology, thereby opening up paths to post-secondary learning. The students spend six weeks of the summer working as interns in laboratories and research projects at York University and Seneca. The *Summer Arts Institute* was designed to complement YSSSTP and to offer arts enrichment to students in the Jane-Finch area. Throughout the month of July students representing each of the twenty-two partnership schools study Visual Arts, Dance, Music or Drama. Within this model, students develop knowledge and skills in fine arts, cooperative teamwork, leadership and the integration of the arts within other disciplines. Another important initiative, *Readers to Leaders (R2L)*, is designed for secondary school students who may need additional assistance in an intensive literacy skills development program to ensure success on the mandatory Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). The program provides direct instruction in reading and writing skills, questioning techniques, test-taking strategies, and vocabulary acquisition. Students examine print, electronic and media texts from a variety of academic content areas and other sources in a structured supportive environment in which critical thinking and risk-taking are encouraged.

As of 2006/07, the program also added research initiatives to its portfolio. Partnering with a graduate course in the Faculty of Arts (Sociology Department) at York University, master's and doctoral students received the opportunity to design and administer a variety of qualitative and quantitative research instruments. The results from the different approaches are compared to derive a consistent picture of the effects of programs on participants. The initial focus of the research is on the *ACE* and *Promoting Excellence* programs. The ultimate goals are to track students at grade 8 and above to determine their eventual post-secondary destination, and to evaluate immediate impact on the academic performance, social skills and vocational aspirations of students between grades 3 and grade 7. Additional graduate students have been hired for 2007 to assist the Coordinator with the *Westview Alumni @ York (WAY)* and *Higher 5 Programs*, to provide increased research capacity in documenting the history and evolution of the Partnership, and to synthesize and report on the data collected from the current initiatives.

Collaboration with a number of community agencies and the work of volunteers are both important aspects of this initiative. The non-governmental social service agencies and cultural organizations in York University's neighborhood increase the impact of their distinct and separate services through their joint membership in The Network of Community Based Organizations. There is also a growing demand for York students to serve as mentors and volunteers both in Partnership schools and in the community agencies. The Partners in Education program at Stong College places York University students in schools or other educational settings, such as homework clubs or community centres. York's Math Department has recruited ten of its students to volunteer at Shoreham P.S. in the JUMP program, a one-on-one math-tutoring program. Students from Vanier College also tutor at Shoreham on a regular basis.

The bulk of the Westview Partnership's funding comes from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. However, many of the new initiatives are only possible due to financial support directly from the community. In the fall of 2000, faculty, staff and alumnae of the Faculty of Education were invited to donate their Ontario tax rebate to a new Faculty of Education bursary fund. In the months that followed, \$10,000 was collected. This sum will produce a bursary each year for a Westview graduate entering either the Consecutive or Concurrent program in the Faculty of Education. In addition, thanks to an anonymous donor, two new university entry bursaries of \$1500 each, as well as three \$1000 scholarships for the Concurrent program, have been designated for Westview graduates. The French and Mathematics Departments of York University have each donated \$100 to Gosford P.S. for outstanding students. The York University Faculty Association offers bursaries of up to \$5000 to students who successfully complete the ACE program and subsequently register at York.

To find out more about The Westview Partnership and opportunities to get involved, please contact:

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