Businesses invited to come "back to school," too!

By Ashby C. Kilgore, Ed.D., Superintendent, Newport News Public Schools

"Back-to-school" columns traditionally focus on students and family members getting ready for another year of learning and growth. Newport News Public Schools (NNPS) has been busy helping families prepare for another great year, and to help make that happen there's another group we also want to invite—the business community.

With robust Career Pathways and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) programs, a strong focus on postsecondary preparation and a commitment to helping young people develop into contributing members of the community, NNPS offers students an impressive array of programs. We believe that bringing in expertise from the business community makes our offerings even stronger.

For example, Heritage High School is an award-winning school designated by Virginia as a Governor's STEM Academy, with highly qualified teachers and a variety of specialized courses. Adding Shipyard designers who visit regularly to talk with students about their work and Apprentice School students who mentor students provides a real-world glimpse into exciting careers.

Newport News Public Schools is fortunate to already have a strong group of business partners who work with our students to bring their expertise and experience into the classroom. Five large corporations—Newport News Shipbuilding/Huntington Ingalls Industries, Riverside Regional Health System, Dominion Virginia Power, NASA Langley and Jefferson Lab—are on the Virginia School Boards Association Business Honor Roll as a result of their partnerships with NNPS. Other large companies such as Canon, Ferguson, Old Point National Bank and Mary Immaculate Hospital also provide significant resources that help our students.

Smaller companies, too, contribute to the wealth of opportunities available to students in Newport News. In fact, the Oyster Pointer was named to the Virginia School Boards Association Media Honor Roll last year. By publishing information about educational programs and providing a writing internship to high school students, the newspaper serves as a positive partner with our schools.

Whether large, small or medium-sized, all companies and organizations can contribute to helping every student become ready for college, careers and citizenship. Getting started is easy:

1. Think about what your company or organization could do to help students. Among the most needed partnership activities are:
   - Job shadowing opportunities
   - Short and long-term internships
   - Judges for science fairs and other events
   - Mentors who visit students at school on a regular basis
   - Career fair presenters
   - Tutors
   - Sponsors for field trips and other events

2. Contact a school near you or that you already have a connection with, and talk with its partnership coordinator about getting involved.

3. Meet with the partnership coordinator to agree upon what your partnership will involve.

4. Work collaboratively with the school throughout the year, and be sure to share your efforts with our community relations office so that we can highlight examples in our publications and web pages.

5. Take time at the end of the year to celebrate your work and reflect on goals for the next year.

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This September, in addition to our students and their families, we also want to welcome you, our members of the business community, back to school!

Dr. Ashby C. Kilgore is superintendent of Newport News Public Schools and can be reached at 757-591-4502. For information about business-education partnerships, contact the NNPS business-education partnership office at 757-591-4936.

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