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Selfless Leader

10.29.2009 | Faculty  The National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Dayton honored Dayton Early College Academy principal Judy Hennessy on Oct. 26 with a 2009 Humanitarian Award for her commitment to "the promise that education offers every American — a level playing field."

Despite a school poverty rate of 97.3 percent, all 105 of DECA's graduates have been accepted to college. DECA's early success has earned the school a bronze rating on U.S. News and World Report's list of "America's Best High Schools," the Council of Great Cities' Schools 2009 Urban Impact Award and a designation as one of the five most innovative high schools in the country by WestEd.

The University of Dayton founded DECA in 2003 in partnership with Dayton Public Schools as Ohio's first early college high school focused on helping low-income, minority and first-generation college-going students. DECA reorganized in 2007 as a charter school operated by the University of Dayton — the nation's only charter school operated by a Catholic university.

A Dayton native and first-generation college graduate, Hennessy has been a superintendent, assistant superintendent, college instructor, principal and classroom teacher. Motivated by the race riots that plagued the nation and Dayton in the summer following her graduation from Colonel White High School, she enrolled in a teacher education program designed to prepare teachers for urban schools — and promptly dedicated her life's work to children.

Watch the WDTN-TV interview with Hennessy above to hear why she's so passionate about the power of education to transform lives.