2-2-2007

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Recommended Citation

"DECA Supported by DP+L Grant" (2007). News Releases. 2228.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/2228
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02.02.2007 | Campus and Community, Students, Education

"This is a solid gift that spotlights diversity in our schools. It is a way to support young people who are growing, learning and developing into active, contributing members of our community," said Ginny Strausburg, executive director of the DP&L Foundation.

DECA Principal Judy Hennessey said, "The DP&L Foundation has stepped up in a tangible way to help us make DECA a great school. We have many needs beyond the scope of our budget. This support helps students who have great promise receive the boost they need to reach their dreams."

The gift is a significant local contribution and will fund several strategic service expansions for students. The DP&L Foundation's contribution will allow DECA to extend the school day and school year by paying teachers and transportation costs, enlarge the mentoring program and increase assistance in preparing for college entrance examinations.

"Community partnerships are absolutely essential in all school settings but especially in urban contexts," said Thomas J. Lasley II, dean of UD's School of Education and Allied Professions. "Unless corporate partners such as DP&L make the commitment to affirm the public schools it will be almost impossible for young people in Dayton to achieve their full potential and for the Dayton schools to be truly excellent."

One of the first institutions of its kind in the United States and the first early college high school in Ohio, DECA targets students from low-income families with college potential who might be the first in their families to receive a college degree or who were not successful in more traditional schools.

Students work with an individualized curriculum and can earn up to two years of college credit during their high school years.

"The students exemplify a desire for learning and an aspiration for the opportunities that the school puts within reach," Strausburg said. "DP&L plans to get even more involved through mentoring and other direct support of the students," she added.

DECA opened on the UD campus in the fall of 2003 with start-up funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

About 220 students currently attend the school, which is located on Brown Street in the College Park Center. In May, DECA will graduate its first class.

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