

Brevard Schools Foundation

## Foundation helps needy children

*BY MARIA SONNENBERG  
FOR FLORIDA TODAY*

Since 1987, the Brevard Schools Foundation has enhanced the school life of Brevard County students, one child at a time.

Even the most basic of school supplies -- crayons, a backpack -- can turn a child toward a brighter future, and the foundation makes certain all Brevard students can enter their classrooms prepared to learn.

"We're a direct support organization for Brevard public schools and the best kept secret in Brevard County," executive director Lynn Clifton said.

Like the school district it serves, the foundation has experienced tremendous growth in recent years.

With a \$3.1 million budget, the foundation reaches out to Brevard's 75,000 students with everything from school supplies for needy students to dropout prevention programs.

Every August, the foundation teams up with local companies to provide all the necessary tools of learning to children from the area's poorest sections. With the support of Boeing Corp., United Space Alliance, Community Educators' Credit Union and Space Coast Credit Union, the foundation purchased enough supplies to help 7,000 students this year.

Volunteers, Boy Scout troops and Rotarians helped distribute the supplies to individual students, including those living at area homeless and domestic violence shelters.

"Many of these children would otherwise come to school empty handed," Clifton said.

Foundation staff and volunteers know that as students grow, more than a backpack is necessary to keep them focused on higher education. That's when the foundation's signature program, Take Stock in Children, takes over.

"We target secondary school students from families who are at or below poverty level," Clifton said.

Students agree to maintain at least a 2.5 GPA and a good attendance record, be drug-free and have no discipline issues. Mentors meet with students at least weekly to discuss anything from school to personal problems.

"We will do whatever we need to do to get that student to college," Clifton said.

When Take Stock in Children participants graduate from high school, they receive a four-year prepaid college scholarship. Currently, 197 students are enrolled in the program and 55 more are expected to be join in January.

In addition to the school supply drive and Take Stock in Children, the Foundation provides money that allows needy students to travel to academic competitions. It also provides classroom grants to help local teachers.

All this couldn't be accomplished without the 22,000 individuals -- including teen volunteers -- who last year logged more than 1.06 million volunteer hours sharing their talent, energy and love of learning with Brevard students.

"Volunteers are a vital part of the school system," Clifton said.