

News

Summer Program Mentors Students in Business, Leadership, Civics

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Worcester Youth Leadership Institute organizers, from left, are Jeff Turgeon of the Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board; Ron Scott of United Families for Change; Raquel Castro-Corazzini, Youth Opportunities coordinator for the city; and Tim Murray, of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. (T&G Staff/CHRISTINE PETERSON)

WORCESTER — A summer program is giving 30 area high school students the opportunity to work with and be mentored by local business leaders.

The Worcester Youth Leadership Institute is part of the YouthWorks program, a state-funded summer and year-round job program for Massachusetts low-income youths, which subsidizes private, public and non-profit jobs for at-risk youths between the ages of 14 and 21, according to worcesterrecources.org.

"Worcester has received funding to employ 360 youth for the (YouthWorks) program," said Jeff Turgeon, executive director of the Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board. "They will work 20 hours a week, for seven weeks, at different nonprofit and for-profit sites, doing work such as park cleanups, office work, online editing, science and technology work, like visiting the Tufts (veterinary) clinic at Worcester Tech."

The institute was created through a partnership with the Workforce Investment Board, United Way of Central Massachusetts, United Families for Change, Worcester Education Collaborative, the City of Worcester's Youth Opportunities Office and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Of those 360 youths enrolled in YouthWorks, 30 senior and junior high students were selected from employer nominations to participate in the institute as part of their employment program. The seven-week Institute, which began July 7, includes a variety of events such as question-and-answer sessions with business leaders and visits and tours.



Students will also take part in a leadership program called Bounce! offered through the Workforce Central Career Center.

"The Bounce training program was brought to us from Australia and was incorporated in a previous youth program here," Mr. Turgeon said. Local staff have become certified trainers.

"It will allow students to learn high-level communication skills and strategies, goal setting and attainment strategies and how to develop a positive vision for themselves," he said.

This aspect of the institute will help make the program "real for kids" and also make it fun, said Timothy P. Murray, president and chief executive officer of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

In addition, a skills development component will teach students about Worcester history, culture, life and health sciences, nonprofit organizations, entrepreneurship, media and communications and city government.

Mr. Murray said the program is "about leadership succession in the business community, government and the nonprofit and education world. It's an opportunity for various sectors and leaders to reach out and engage with youth."

The idea for the program came from conversations he had "about the needs of community youth and job opportunities" with Worcester Mayor Joseph Petty and with George Smith and Ron Scott from United Families for Change, leaders in minority communities.

Mr. Murray said after the summer program is over, they are thinking about getting the students together periodically during the school year.

"We will see these students as leaders in years to come," he said. "I have high expectations for the students and their future leadership. They will help shape the city."