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College-school partnerships praised

Panelists say local arrangements benefit college students and city youths.

October 16, 2002

By **Maureen Nolan**
Staff writer

Leaders from local colleges and universities that work with the Syracuse school district affirmed their support for the relationships Tuesday and considered how to improve them on behalf of city youths.

The many partnerships include providing mentors and tutoring to city students and extra training for teachers. Representatives from Onondaga Community College, Syracuse University, SUNY Upstate Medical University, State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry and LeMoyne College attended a "partnership conference" sponsored by the city school district and OCC.

The 80 people who attended the half-day conference included district staff and representatives from state, city and county governments and community agencies.

Higher education leaders agreed during a panel discussion that their relationships with the city schools benefit their own institutions as well as the district. Their staff and students benefit from field experience and research, they said. Another benefit is the development of well-qualified high school graduates who might attend their schools, they said.

OCC President Debbie Sydow said her vision for education from elementary school through college is to make sure students who enter OCC are prepared for college-level work. She said 70 percent of students who take the placement test required to enroll in OCC need remedial math and 45 percent need remedial English.

"Those figures are staggering," Sydow said.

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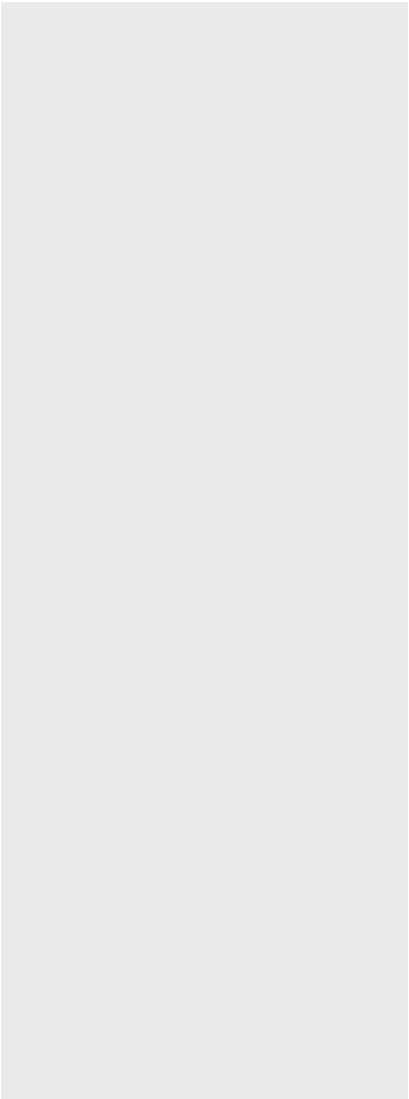
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The placement test takers include nontraditional students, not just students fresh out of high school, and the average age of an OCC student is 29, Sydow said.

The Rev. Charles Beirne, president of LeMoyne, urged his colleagues to act to resolve systemic problems that affect the city school district, for instance, school financing.

Syracuse Superintendent Stephen C. Jones called the conference a beginning and said the conversation needs to continue.

State Regent Anthony Bottar addressed the gathering about the struggle to boost the success of students who lag behind and about the new federal No Child Left Behind Act. The act holds school districts more accountable for making sure that all children do well.

Collaborations that help school districts are more important than ever in an era of inadequate funding for urban districts, Bottar said.

Those attending the conference got a peek at a new Web site that eventually will list all the partnerships between the district and higher education.

The site stems from an initiative by Assemblywoman Joan Christensen, D-Syracuse, who said it may show gaps in services.

Barbara Shelly and Ruth Federman Stein, both of SU, developed the Web site. Shelly is an assistant professor in SU's School of Education and project director of The Living Schoolbook, an SU teaching and technology research program. Federman Stein is project manager in the Center of Support for Teaching and Learning and a former city school board member. The Web address is: <http://highered.syr.edu/>

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