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Putting East Allen 'on the map' **Program shows teachers how to engage students**

In 30 years, Title I administrator Jeanne Zehr has never seen East Allen County Schools academics as bad as it is today. Board president Stephen Terry said the district is in a state of emergency.

The National Urban Alliance says there's hope.

“(The district) needs to rethink its expectations about all the students in East Allen. ... We want to put East Allen on the map. It can be the little engine that could,” NUA founder and president Eric Cooper said after speaking to a group of about 50 people Tuesday about the initiative to improve the Harding-area schools.

It's been done in Seattle, Minneapolis, even Indianapolis. For the first time, NUA is coming into a small school district with the same goal in mind: Engage teachers to engage students.

A team of about 10 former teachers, principals and superintendents will station themselves in Fort Wayne over the next few months to evaluate and gather data about the schools - Harding High School, Prince Chapman Academy, Southwick Elementary and Village Elementary - for what works best as they move into creating a summer leadership academy for professional development of teachers and ultimately establish a mind-set for all staff.

A mentor is also being placed at each of the four schools to work with the administration and the teachers to show them the best teaching methods and ways to reach all students at all levels.

“We have teachers who are overwhelmed with what is being asked of them,” Zehr said. “NUA is kind of a renewal, a breath of fresh air.”

Over the next three to five years, NUA will coach teachers and administration to create a better learning environment and then train teachers to continue the initiative long after they are gone. Cooper said in many cases, results are seen within a couple of years.

In Indianapolis, it meant 20 of its schools became Blue Ribbon Schools, an honor given by the state. In other cities, it's been a dramatic growth in student passing rates on standardized tests. EACS officials are excited to see what their success story will be.

"We are in this to transform this bad boy," Terry said.

The help is coming with a hefty price tag, though - about \$400,000 per year for four schools - but Zehr said she is pulling from all funding opportunities to have and keep the program in the district.

"Everything I can do except a bake sale," she said, adding that if more funding would be available, she would like to add more schools.
