

Boys & Girls Club of Dane County plans ambitious program to improve graduation rates

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Michael Johnson, CEO of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Dane County, left, talks with Jeff Mauer, owner of Fresh Madison Market, outside the Freshmobile in Madison.

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Boys & Girls Club, Madison schools team up more to boost achievement

Planned \$15 million expansion marks a shift toward academic services in hopes of smoothing students' path to higher education. Read more

The Boys & Girls Club of Dane County plans to raise \$15 million over the next six years to improve the graduation rates of low-income and minority students in Madison and Verona.

"We're not doing a capital campaign to build new buildings," CEO Michael Johnson told the State Journal on Wednesday. "We're doing a campaign to put money in schools."

The organization plans to raise \$8 million through grants, \$3.3 million through two annual fundraising events, \$2.4 million from individual, corporate and private group donations, and \$2 million through service contracts, including acquisition of some smaller area nonprofits.

Joe Gothard, Madison's assistant superintendent for secondary schools, called the Boys & Girls Club plan an "overall ambitious and noteworthy strategy."

Johnson plans to announce more details about the campaign and the organization's new strategic plan at a fundraiser on Feb. 22.

The event will feature American Idol winner Ruben Studdard, six-time Olympic medalist Jackie Joyner-Kersey and African-American entrepreneur Michael Roberts.

Johnson hopes the event will raise \$150,000 to launch the campaign. He also plans to announce a \$2 million grant to support low-income students participating in the organization's AVID/TOPS college preparatory program, which involves tutoring, study skills development and accelerated courses for students in the academic middle with college aspirations.

Boys & Girls Club of America president Jim Clark, who previously led the local Milwaukee affiliate, will also be there to announce a partnership with two local companies that will involve company products featuring the group's logo.

Serving 10,000 youths

The fundraising goal is part of a new strategic plan that also involves quadrupling the number of youths served, from about 2,500 last year to 10,000. The plan also sets an "audacious" goal of ensuring at least 90 percent of participants graduate from high school prepared for college, Johnson said.

The organization is focusing more on its educational mission and less on being a recreational outlet for low-income young people, Johnson said.

The money the group hopes to raise will help expand the AVID/TOPS partnership with the Madison School District and its College Club program, which puts students on a path to college as early as kindergarten. Johnson wants more Boys & Girls Club case workers in the schools to collaborate with teachers to monitor a student's academic progress.

Madison's four main high schools were recently designated as Boys & Girls Club extension sites by the national organization. The designation requires each school to house a Boys & Girls Club office with staff that is open at least four days a week. It also qualifies the school programs for funding from the national organization, Gothard said.

"You wouldn't walk into our schools and notice anything different," Gothard said. "But it definitely puts Madison, Wisconsin, and Dane County on the map as having some exceptional community partnerships."

The organization's focus on education comes as the Madison School District accelerates its efforts to raise minority and low-income student achievement. The district spent \$1.3 million this year to expand the AVID/TOPS program from high school to all middle schools as part of its \$7.5 million achievement gap plan.

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Johnson said more than 70 percent of the Boys & Girls Club's local youths come from single-parent households. More than 80 percent qualify as low-income according to federal school-lunch guidelines and about 90 percent are minorities.

Johnson projects participation among white, Latino and Asian youths will grow the most by 2018, with participation among blacks declining from 54 percent to 30 percent.

Tags Boys & Girls Club Of Dane County, Graduation Rates, Madison Schools, Verona Schools, Michael Johnson, Joe Gothard, Jim Clark

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