

Ford rewards school districts - Pensacola News Journal

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Escambia and Santa Rosa business and education leaders sat shoulder-to-shoulder Tuesday morning, filling up the seats of Woodham Middle School's library.

The Ford Motor Fund, the philanthropic arm of Ford Motor Co., was recognizing the cooperation among the two school districts and businesses in setting up career academies for high school students.

The two school districts received a check for \$30,000 and the distinction of becoming a Ford Partnership for Advanced Studies Next Generation Learning Community at the Leadership Level, one of only six in the country.

The lengthy title means Escambia and Santa Rosa counties are leading the country in the development of their career academies and will receive funding, training and support from Ford to further the success.

"We've just swept the Oscars," said Carl Leiterman, director of workforce education for Escambia County. "For an education-business partnership, that's exactly what we've done. This is the highest level you can get as far as recognition."

In the past nine years, about 50 career academies have been created across the two counties, encompassing about 26 percent of Escambia's high school students and almost 50 percent of Santa Rosa's high school students, according to district officials.

Career academies allow students to take electives and general education classes that are focused around their career path; some offer industry certification upon completion.

"Kids are more focused. Attendance is better. They have a sense of

belonging, a sense of teamwork,” Leiterman said. “The world is just waiting for them. And in today’s economic times, they are going to have the skill sets that make them so competitive.”

Since 2000, Escambia and Santa Rosa began experimenting with career academies and have since developed successful partnerships with Gulf Power Co., Work Force Escarosa, the University of West Florida, Pensacola Junior College and the Pensacola Bay Area Chamber of Commerce.

“As a company, we really believe if you don’t invest in students and you don’t invest in youth to provide them with every opportunity to engage them in the classroom then we’re not going to be successful as a nation,” said Cheryl Carrier, Ford Motor Fund program director.

Both education and business leaders expect Ford’s partnership to help boost the local economy by reforming high school education and integrating economic development.

“They go hand in hand,” Leiterman said. “We as a community had to recognize that all education is workforce education. And all workforce education is economic development. We are training to attract industry here with a skilled workforce.”