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Taft Adopts IPS School #58

Taft Law is also sharpening its philanthropic focus. In 2011 and 2012, Taft contributed and pledged more than \$300,000 to Ralph Waldo Emerson School 58. The funds help support a full-time community/school coordinator, a part-time parent liaison/after-school assistant, funding for additional after-school programs, transportation home from those programs and more. A big component is Taft employees volunteering at the elementary school.

According to Taft Indianapolis Partner-in-Charge Bob Hicks, the program grew from his firm's focus on diversity in the workplace and recognition that one key to creating a diverse workforce is to address it at its core – by improving educational opportunities at the elementary school level. A second motivation was to find a life-changing community service project that would build camaraderie and morale among employees. The final consideration: "I want our people to see what's going on in the real world," he says. "The adopt-a-school approach was a great project



Dawn Highbaugh
at ReadUp.

to bring all those goals together."

Taft turned to the United Way of Central Indiana to help structure the program because of its involvement in IPS schools. According to Taft Business Development Director Kelly Sharpe, the firm wanted to work with a diverse enrollment of underprivileged kids at a school close enough to its office so people could easily volunteer during the day.

About 30 Taft employees regularly volunteer at the school, helping with classes, after-school programs and more. Others make significant donations of money and supplies.

Sharpe emphasizes that Taft is in for the long haul. "We discussed the long-term nature of our commitment when we created the program," she says. "We understood we wouldn't see immediate change because it would take time to build awareness and communicate to students, teachers and parents about the program.

"Our vision is to improve the students'

academic success and engage them in after-school programs," Sharpe explains. "Last year we had great enrollment for after-school programs. We want to increase that because it's important to provide the kids with a safe place after school versus many of them going home to an empty house or getting into trouble after school. More and more students are signing up for programs and staying. We've also seen improvement in test scores." The benefits go both ways. "We've gotten as much or more out of this program as the School 58 kids," Hicks says. "When people see each other doing good things from the bottom of their heart, it develops a deeper bond among employees. People like, care and learn more about each other when they work together for a great cause."

Sharpe agrees. "People feel empowered that they're able to volunteer during work hours and that the firm supports their volunteerism. They feel they work for a place that cares."

