



## Honorable Mention

### Charlotte County Support Personnel Association

Employees in the Charlotte County (Fla.) Support Personnel Association cover a wide spectrum of occupations. They include custodians, paraprofessionals transportation workers, food service workers and maintenance workers. The CCSPA's challenge is to meet the ongoing learning needs of this diverse group of support staff.

To address the problem, the CCSPA turned to the Charlotte County Public Schools Partnership and Performance Council, which was set up in the union contract with the Charlotte County Public Schools to guide labor-management relationships for negotiations, members' issues and daily working relationships. The council, in turn, created a steering committee that designed a ground-breaking learning program called the Charlotte Academy of Support Employees, modeled after the "corporate university" concept.

"Prior to the initiation of the CASE program, in-service training lacked focus and opportunity for support employees," said Bonnie Bistarkey, president of the CCSPA. "The increasing number of participants demonstrates the satisfaction with the CASE program. Participants express increased job satisfaction and enhanced skill sets."

#### A PROFESSIONAL BOOST

The Charlotte Academy for Support Employees solicits employee feedback and creates high-quality professional development based on the needs of both the employees and the district. Implemented in 2010, the voluntary courses offered through CASE are research-based and rigorous.

CASE also promotes coaching and mentoring, and classes are sequenced to allow for employees' continued professional development over time. While some courses are offered through outside online providers, many of the courses were designed by teachers in the district and some were developed by support staff employees themselves.

"Teaching a class, I feel like I'm giving back to a program that has given me so much," says Mary Ellen Meek, who works as a bus driver and a CASE trainer. "I thoroughly enjoy taking the classes and giving the classes."

In the wake of cuts to education budgets, workers in Charlotte County would not see traditional raises because of decreased funding, a result of reduced property values, among other things. CASE instituted a compensation system that includes \$350 for completion of each tier requirement and provides employees a valuable opportunity to earn additional income. An employee in the district can complete four tiers and earn \$1,400 in permanent annual compensation.

#### CASE RESULTS

- In the first two years of the CASE program, 115 employees participated.
- As of April 2013, there had been more than 300 participants.
- In the first year of the program, 35 CASE participants increased their annual income by more than \$22,000 (combined total).

