Perhaps the most frequent appeal made by inner-city school administrators is for more staff.

Aware of this ever-present need, Dawn Arno, director of the Teachers College Education Zone Partnership project, a key component of the Campaign for Education Equity, has developed two programs that pair Teachers College students with children in several neighborhood elementary schools. The school children receive prized individual attention, while the TC students gain valuable insight and a tuition discount equivalent to two to four credit hours per semester, an expense offset in part by TC Fund contributions.

The first program, Reading Buddies, began last spring. For two-and-a-half hours each weekday, 38 TC students delivered one-on-one instruction to 240 struggling first and third-graders from four elementary schools.

The impact was immediate. English Language Assessment scores, critical to promotion, improved—dramatically, in some instances. For example, the number of third-graders who failed the ELA dropped so significantly at PS 123 there was no need to run a summer school program.

Arno attributes the breakthroughs made by the TC students “to having one person working with you and affirming you. We are about interrupting the failure cycle.”

Last fall, the TC EdZone built upon their initial success and launched a second pilot, Math Buddies, which focuses on a class’ top performers. Four days a week, 10 TC students, most in the math education program, worked with four groups of third and fourth-grade students at one neighborhood school. TC students receive a four-credit discount because of additional hours worked each Saturday.

Like Reading Buddies, Math Buddies attended an orientation prior to visiting the school. “Often we inadvertently stereotype the children in these struggling schools,” Arno explains. “Our first priority was to approach them as children who are willing and able to learn advanced concepts.”

Bill Bassett, a teacher from Connecticut who became a full-time student last year in the TC math education program, found that he, like many of his peers, had to re-evaluate his expectations. “These kids were like sponges, and I just wasn’t expecting that.” Classmate Amy Nuzzolese was similarly surprised. “When you least expect to find greatness, it’s there, and it’s up to you to uncover it.”

Arno’s recipe for the Buddies’ success called for changing the learning context, small groups, providing challenging content, and instilling confidence. The TC students saved the most demanding material for the last session of each week offered on Saturdays. They focused on the study of geometry, which Arno says encourages students to expand their own thinking and learning, thus deepening their understanding of mathematical concepts. Parents were also required to attend on Saturdays, and they learned from technology assistant Yaowen Chang how to support their children’s education through the use of educational technology. The Saturday session also included an art component taught by TC students, who received a two-credit discount.

At the end of the semester, Arno says the TC students found that 10 percent of each group belonged in a gifted program. “I think the program works because it’s consistent and because it’s presented by math specialists,” Nuzzolese explains. “People who love math can’t help but share that love and create a space that says, ‘this is something that is ok to enjoy.’”

Likewise, the school children taught the TC students a great deal. “The children taught me how to really articulate myself and gave me more confidence in public speaking,” says Yuanda “Kenny” Zhang, a former engineer who will graduate this summer from the math education program.

TC students also picked up some important classroom management tips from their students’ teachers. “I observed some new techniques that were useful and effective,” Bassett says. “I’ve been able to see the craft of teaching differently.”

The impact of the two programs goes beyond the valuable experience the TC students gained and their success with individual children. Arno says it has opened the door for greater TC student and faculty involvement in these neighborhood schools, a broader goal of the TC EdZone. “These programs have served as a catalyst for deepening the relationships between Teachers College and schools that need the resources we can supply.”

TC students receive a three-credit discount equivalent to $2,805 for their efforts with Reading Buddies, and a four-credit discount equivalent to $3,740 for Math Buddies. Your TC Fund dollars provided support for the pilot year and will be critical to the programs’ continued success.
Support for Financial Aid makes it possible for Teachers College to attract the most outstanding students, regardless of their ability to pay. This is crucial in light of rising education costs, which place financial burdens (often in the form of loans) on students who have chosen to enter traditionally low-paying professions.

Scholarships are especially important in recruiting students from under-represented groups. These future leaders and teachers will be crucial role models in our increasingly diverse society.

A Teachers College education is costly, and scholarship funds are extremely limited. Tuition for the 2005-2006 academic year was $935 per credit. As demonstrated in the graphs below, the number of financial aid recipients and dollars awarded continue to increase on an annual basis. However, of the 5,000 students currently enrolled at TC, only 40% receive some form of scholarship aid. For those that do receive support, the average award is six credits of tuition.

Last fall, Teachers College welcomed Melanie J. Williams-Bethea as the new Director of Financial Aid. She possesses a true passion for helping every qualified student fulfill their education goals.

When it comes to graduate education, Williams-Bethea explains, federal and state funding is limited. Only undergraduates are eligible for grants, and the cap on federal loans has not increased in 20 years. This forces students to seek private funding, which almost always carries a higher interest rate.

Last year, Teacher’s College awarded more than $7 million from its own funds in scholarship and stipend aid, and $2 million of endowed funds to new and continuing students. “It’s such a help to have that something extra,” Williams-Bethea says of the scholarship monies that TC Fund dollars support. “A $1,000 award can really make a difference for a student.”

Financial Aid’s Future

For the first time in eight years, spring has sprung at Teachers College without a trace of scaffolding, marking the completion of a mammoth exterior restoration project.

Each of TC’s eight buildings now has new roofs, repaired masonry and soundproof windows. The approximately $20 million undertaking began about 10 years ago, shortly after President Arthur E. Levine assumed leadership of Teachers College.

“At that time, the entire facility was suffering from neglect,” says Vincent Del Bagno, director of capital projects and construction. “The greatest danger was water penetration from cracks in the masonry joints and leaks in the roofs.”

The recently completed exterior repairs constituted the first phase of a two-phase plan to upgrade and modernize the campus from the outside in. The renovated facades remain true to their original architecture; with the exception of Thorndike Hall, the campus buildings date from approximately 1890 to 1920. Nearly all have slate roofs, complex copper work and intricate stonework. Whittier Hall proved the most demanding, with its elaborate detail.

While the buildings are not classified as landmarks, Del Bagno and his team worked closely with the New York City Landmarks Conservancy to preserve the original architecture yet modernize where necessary and appropriate. “I think our efforts have been much appreciated by the Conservancy and the community,” Del Bagno says.

“This work was vital to maintaining the structural integrity of our campus buildings and ensuring a safe and pleasant atmosphere for our students, faculty and staff in the decades to come,” says Fred Schnur, Vice President for Finance and Administration.

“TC Fund dollars have helped pay for the cost of these repairs. These generous donations truly make a difference in the quality of life here at TC.”
A Seamless Experience
The New Office of Enrollment & Student Services

In any field, being a leader and maintaining that position requires constant re-examination of systems and practices. As one of the nation’s foremost institutions dedicated to providing advanced study in the field of education, Teacher’s College strives not only to better its academic offerings, but improve the overall student experience.

When Dean Don Martin joined Teachers College just over a year ago, he sought to enhance the level of customer service and departmental continuity. The first step in that direction was the establishment of the Office of Enrollment and Student Services (OESS), which pulled together several departments that once operated independently. OESS includes Admissions, Career Services, Doctoral Studies, Financial Aid, International Services, Registrar, the Office of Access and Services for Individuals with Disabilities, Student Activities and Programs, Student Advisement, Staff Development, Marketing, and Technical Support.

Thanks to a division-wide training effort spearheaded by Martin, staff gained insight into the functions and responsibilities of each department, creating greater unity that has resulted in improved student assistance. In addition, the entire division participated in a two-day customer service workshop.

Martin and his team also implemented other relatively small changes that have positively affected students. For example, orientation was expanded from one to five days and library hours were extended during mid-term and finals weeks.

“We are here for our students,” Dean Martin says. “We want to provide a seamless experience for TC students.” To this end, Dean Martin also believes in giving students a number of ways to provide feedback through surveys, open office hours, town hall meetings and recruitment events.

“I found that the staff in the OESS provided both innumerable resources and formal support for the Senate,” says Kim Pereira, 2004-05 Student Senate president and a doctoral student in the Higher and Postsecondary Education program. “Don Martin’s energy and leadership has made the OESS a place where students can now go to get their administrative and other problems resolved in a timely and pleasant manner.”

Gifts to the Teachers College Fund help ensure that TC continues to provide students with the resources they need to succeed both in and out of the classroom. TC Fund dollars are used to improve the educational experience for all students by supporting the creation of campus-wide social, cultural, academic and professional programs.