DURHAM, N.C. – More Duke University students than ever before are tutoring Durham schoolchildren this fall as the campus takes part in America Counts, a new national mathematics enrichment effort, and extends its commitment to the America Reads literacy program.

“We have a lot of students at Duke who are interested in the Durham community, who want to be a part of it,” said Elaine Madison, director of Duke’s Community Service Center. “Participating in the literacy and mathematics tutoring programs is a great way to help others and to learn about Durham.”

The 121 Duke tutors signed up this fall are the result of a joint venture between the federal government, Duke University, Glaxo Wellcome and the Durham Public Schools.

The Clinton administration created the America Reads program in 1996 to recruit and train tutors in one of the largest campaigns ever against illiteracy. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley announced plans for America Counts, which is designed to boost math education in U.S. schools, earlier this year.

To help achieve the goals set for the federal initiatives, the Clinton administration has committed federal funding to recruit and organize tutors on college campuses. His administration has also called on colleges and universities to dedicate at least half of new federal work-study funds to community service, including 100,000 jobs for tutors.

Duke has committed up to $100,000 in the coming academic year to support placing work-study students and volunteers in six public schools – E.K. Powe, George Watts, Lakewood and Forest View elementary schools, Morehead Montessori Magnet School and Rogers-Herr Sixth Grade Center. The six are a part of the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership Initiative, a 3-year-old effort aimed at strengthening the university’s ties to its surrounding community.

Duke’s Community Service Center and Office of Community Affairs coordinate the university’s participation in the tutoring programs with assistance from the Office of Undergraduate Financial Aid.
Research Triangle Park-based pharmaceutical giant Glaxo Wellcome is helping to make the tutoring programs possible with a $20,000 contribution. Since federal regulations prohibit the costs of training, reading materials and transportation for the tutors to be covered by work-study funds, Glaxo Wellcome is providing the funding for the third consecutive year to cover those items and teacher stipends.

John F. Burness, Duke’s senior vice president for public affairs and government relations, said the support from Glaxo Wellcome is “crucial to the success of this important effort.

“Glaxo Wellcome is known both locally and nationally for its leadership in corporate responsibility,” he added. “The grant to support our America Reads and America Counts programs helps ensure that the children tutored have the necessary support for them to succeed.”

Of the 101 America Reads tutors, 71 receive federal work-study funding and 30 are volunteers, according to Madison. The 20 America Counts tutors are a similar mix of work-study students and volunteers.

“A lot of students are considering jobs in education. So this is a real-life way for them to explore a career avenue,” Madison said. “And a lot of students want a break from student life. They want to get involved with real life, where they can make a contribution that is meaningful and makes an impact.”

Duke senior Paul Florence said he was just looking for a work-study job three years ago when he saw an advertisement in The Chronicle, the student-run campus newspaper, asking for America Reads tutors. He signed up – and is now starting his third year-long stint.

“It was pretty shocking to see some of the conditions these children deal with every day. But, on the other hand, it was a great opportunity,” the 21-year-old from Salt Lake City said. “You establish a real relationship with the kids. And you can see the progress that they make as the year progresses. It’s really cool.”

Sophomore D.J. Bolden signed up as an America Reads tutor before realizing he could get paid. Now in his second year with the program, the Atlanta native spends two hours a day, four days a week, tutoring at George Watts Elementary.

“In the beginning, I didn’t really think I could make much of a difference,” said Bolden, 19. “But the more I did, the more the kids opened up and called me their friend and wanted to share. And as we worked together, I saw the improvement.”

Duke students only began math tutoring at the Rogers-Herr after-school program earlier this month, but the program is already drawing a crowd.

“It’s wonderful. They’re helping so much,” said Teri Atkins, assistant manager of the after-school program. “Kids who haven’t even been referred to the program are asking to be referred, but there are only so many tutors to go around.”

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