



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

Travis teachers volunteer time to work with at-risk students

Finding that tutorials on campus were unsuccessful in reaching some of their students struggling the most, W. B. Travis Elementary School teachers Kashanda Hawkins and Kia O 'Berry turned to a friend for inspiration.

That friend, Chance W. Lewis, chairman of Urban Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, wrote the book "An Educator's Guide to Working with African American Students: Strategies for Promoting Academic Success." In it, he states: "We as teachers must be willing to go into our students' neighborhoods to save them."

Thus was born an effort by Mrs. Hawkins and Ms. O'Berry to save some 20 third grade students falling into the at-risk category in reading, math or both.

Another common denominator was that these kids all lived at the Village Apartments, one of the rougher parts of town, according to Baytown police.

At the time, there was no money for the project but that did not stop them.

"It was our idea to go to The Village because the school didn't have enough funding for buses to take the students home," said Mrs. Hawkins "We volunteered to reach out to the community."

Once the teachers got permission from Travis Principal Karen Thomas to get started, they communicated with The Village Apartment managers and "they welcomed us with open arms."

The teachers got permission to do the tutorials in the conference room at the apartment complex two days a week from 4 to 5 p.m.

Mrs. Hawkins additionally attained the services of Karen Mills, Travis campus instructional specialist, to help out with the reading tutorials.

Mrs. Mills is a mentor, facilitator and coach to the teachers at Travis. Having been a classroom teacher herself, she understands the struggles classroom teachers face, and the pressure from parents, the school districts, and state government to have all students on grade level by the end of each the school year.

"The time I spend after work, weekends or holiday preparing lessons or even helping with tutorials like these is all worth it if it makes the teacher's job and lives just a little easier," said Mrs. Mills.

So for three months, each week on Tuesday and Thursday, the three teachers meet the students as they get off the bus at 4 p.m. at the Village office. The students quickly dispersed into three groups, with one group doing math with Ms. O 'Berry and the other two groups doing reading with Mrs. Hawkins or Mrs. Mills.



W.B. Travis Elementary School Campus Instructional Specialist Karen Mills goes over some reading assignments with students.

Again, this was done on their own time, own dime. "Just to see all the students show up for tutorials and want to learn touched our hearts," said Ms.O'Berry. "The parents would stay for tutorials so they would know how to help their children at home. We believe that these students can achieve academically. That's what makes teaching so worthwhile."

Neither Mrs. Hawkins, a third grade reading teacher who has taught for 12 years, eight in Goose Creek, nor Mrs. O'Berry, a third grade math teacher who has been teaching for five years, had much concern about going to The Village Apartments.

"We heard a lot of things about The Village Apartments. It didn't seem like it was the roughest area," said Ms. O'Berry "We can say that from what we have heard we've seen worse."

Both teachers grew up in low socioeconomic areas and know what and how a more challenging environment looks like, they said.

Where the students live, the teachers agreed, shouldn't hinder the opportunity for any student's education, health, or success.

The three-month tutorial sessions at the Village apartments ended on April 19 with a celebration complete with a pizza, cupcakes and juice.

The teachers said the students' grades have continued to improve since starting these tutorials.

"We think that the opportunity of going into the community helps build relationships with the students, parents, and people in the community," Mrs. Hawkins said. "While tutoring other parents who lived in The Village would ask if we were tutoring other age groups. We know that there is a need for educational support in the community. It is up teachers, parents, community leaders, etc. to help close the gap."

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