

COMMUNITY NEWS

Educator house calls

HOME WORKS! program has teachers from Hazelwood School District paying visits to the homes of their students to help families engage in their children's education

By Charlotte Beard

According to a local teacher home visit program, many states in the U.S. require home visits before a child's first year of school. It also states that programs in Texas and California report results of increased academic achievement and test scores, improved attendance and homework completion, a significant increase in family involvement and improved attitudes about school by both the student and the family. As a result of the findings (and the founder's visit to observe the program in Texas), it inspired the creation of St. Louis' Home Works! Program in 2007. The program is utilized in nine school districts in Missouri, including North County's Hazelwood School District.

Karen Kalish, Founder and CEO of the Home Works! Program states that the program was created to get parents and families engaged in their children's education, including partnering with their teachers.

"Children are learning how to read from birth to eight years old," stated Kalish who is a former teacher with years of community service focused on literacy. "But from fourth grade on they must read to learn, and if they don't have those skills it's very, very tough for them, which leads to the problems that we're having (in education) and the drop-out rate. We need these children desperately for our future workforce."

The HOME WORKS! program has three components: home visits, family dinners (sponsored by the program), and parent-teacher learning team meetings. All schools must implement one home visit, one family dinner, and one other component which may include a second home visit or a parent-teacher learning team meeting.



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Student Logan Pinkston and his mother Ashley Pinkston receive a visit from HOME WORKS! teacher Julie Binning.

"(The teachers) have to go through (three-hour) training because they're going into homes that are often very different from their own," stated Kalish. "We love it when the school districts allow anyone that wants to go (on a visit), including the lunch (servers) or custodians. Anyone that is trained can go on the visit. There are two people on every visit; one is the classroom teacher and she or he must know the academics of that child. The co-visitor can be anyone in the building who has been trained. We really talk about race (in the training) because 85 percent of the teachers in America are white women. We strongly urge that at least one of the two (visitors) look

like the family on the other side of the screen door. Now, it doesn't mean that two white people cannot make a great home visit – they have, they are and they will. But it jumpstarts the relationship when one of them looks like you."

Kalish shared that depending on the level of the parental involvement with the school, the initial one or two visits may just focus on parent-teacher relationship building. Discussions may involve the child's attendance, one-on-one reading with the child, and information about the child's skill levels. Every

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visit occurs on a case-by-case basis with teachers remaining cognizant of boundaries to encourage parent-teacher trust. Teachers are urged to visit the homes of students who are functioning below grade level, have an attendance or tardiness issue, English is a second language for the child, the child has disciplinary problems at school, or the child is a new student at the school.

Kalish shared some of the challenges in getting parents to be open to the home visits, not limited to parents' fear of judgment in how they manage home.

"The children, especially the elementary, are so excited to have their teachers in their home. We use that excitement to tell the kids to talk their mom into (an invite). Keep asking until she finally says okay. The kids want their teachers there so bad that they don't notice anything at home that would make a mom, dad or grandma say 'no.' So, we're getting into more homes and the parents are scared."

Kalish further shared that when parents come to realize that the teacher visits are not in place to look in refrigerators or look under beds, for example, there is more opportunity to build the parent-teacher relationship. As

more parents share positive changes in their child due to the visits, more parents have become open to welcoming the teacher visits. Kalish also shared that the teacher visits may start off at a library, community center, playground or other neutral ground that allows the parent and teacher to build trust.

"One by one we start breaking (down those walls). We have dinners at school that we pay for and we have testimonials."

Kalish shared that the program has experienced some difficulty in being implemented for some schools across districts due to some teachers feeling overwhelmed by the undertaking of home visits. In Hazelwood, the program is being implemented in four schools.

"We started out at Southeast Middle, Grannemann, and Twillman," stated Kalish. "Southeast Middle had a very special principal that would not give up on this (program). We've had a core of teachers there who have done a phenomenal job."

Only 40 percent participation of classroom teachers at a school is required to implement the home visit program. According to Kalish, Home Works! discontinued its program with Grannemann due to the level of needed involvement. The program continues to be active at



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Logan Pinkston (left) works with HOME WORKS! teacher Julie Binning.

Southeast Middle, Twillman Elementary, Arrowpoint Elementary and Hazelwood East High.

"We really want to bring about a change in the schools and wider community."

The home visit program functions due to the support of donors. The nonprofit staffed by 10 individuals consisting of professional educators, administrators, and advocates, is located on 1968 Innerbelt Business Center Drive in St. Louis. To donate online or for more information visit <https://www.teacherhomevisit.org>.

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[Alton Resident Surprised with \\$2,000 Scholarship to Western Governors University](#)

ALTON - Alton resident Elizabeth Grenzebach received a huge surprise when she was awarded a \$2,000 “Hey Teach!” scholarship to Western Governors University (WGU) on Oct. 21.

WGU said the scholarship is open to teachers interested in pursuing a master’s degree with the online, nonprofit university.

Grenzebach is an ELL teacher in the Hazelwood School District in Florissant and has nearly 25 years of teaching experience. She is pursuing a Master of Arts in English Language Learning (PreK-12) from WGU.

Jim Chandler, Strategic Partnerships Manager with WGU, presented Grenzebach with the scholarship at her workplace.

<https://www.riverbender.com/articles/details/alton-resident-surprised-with-2000-scholarship-to-western-governors-university-37664.cfm>