



District 200 school staff host Campus Connection night for apartment complex residents

Family and community engagement is a key strategic goal for Woodstock Community Unit School District 200 during the 2018-2019 school year, and staff are always looking for creative ways to make those vital connections.

Keri Pala, principal of Mary Endres Elementary School, along with several other District 200 staff members, attended a family engagement conference this summer in Cleveland and came back with some inspiration to improve the relationship with a specific school population.

More than 70 children from the low-income, Shelia Street apartments off Route 47 attend or will attend Mary Endres, Verda Dierzen Early Learning Center and Northwood Middle School.

While educators know how important it is that families are involved in their children's education, school staff haven't typically seen parents from the complex at parent/teacher conferences or other family activities

"We learned that you need to meet them where they are and establish trusting relationships. So how do we build those trusting relationships?" Pala said. "Our goal was to meet them on their turf and show that we care about them."

Pala discussed the challenge with fellow principals Tricia Bogott from Verda Dierzen and Bethany Hall from Northwood. They decided to host a family event at the complex on Nov. 1 with food, games and information. More than 40 District 200 staff members from the three schools volunteered for the event.

Staff hand delivered invitations promoting the event to residents, posted them in the complex and sent fliers home with students. More than 100 residents attended Thursday's event, which organizers considered a huge success.

Through a combination of state grant dollars, funds donated to District 200 and donations from school families, staff also collected dozens of winter coats, boots, gloves and other warm clothing and distributed them to students who lack sufficient outerwear as winter approaches.

Children also learned how to make slime and took home new games such as Battleship, Clue and Sorry as they enjoyed some out-of-school bonding with teachers and other District 200 staff.

Representatives from Aunt Martha's Health & Wellness were also there to speak with families about healthcare available for the uninsured and underinsured while Women, Infants and Children (WIC) representatives shared information on family nutrition.

Bogott said the reaction from parents, staff and the children was extremely positive.

"We had a parent afterwards come up to tell us how much it was appreciated and how much was it needed," she said.



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