

Community volunteers help out in schools on the Plateau

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For The Reporter

A one-on-one mentoring program for students with language barriers or other academic obstacles is going into its fifth year in the Lake Washington School District (LWSD) with full funding and increased presence in every corner of the district.

LINKS (Looking Into the Needs of Kids and Schools) funding for the 2009-10 school year is made possible with grant money from the Lake Washington Schools Foundation (LWSF) and grantors including the City of Redmond, AT&T and the Discuren Foundation.

LINKS program coordinator Nanci Wehr has use of office space at the LWSD Resource Center, 16250 NE 74th St. at Redmond Town Center and is recruiting volunteers to attend two upcoming orientation sessions there.

All prospective volunteers must complete the LWSD volunteer application (available online at www.lwsd.org) and Washington State Patrol background check.

In 2008-09, LINKS placed volunteers in 13 schools from Alcott Elementary on the far east side of the district to Juanita High School on the far west.

At Mead Elementary School in Sammamish, LINKS volunteers will be helping launch the Lunch Buddy program.

This program is a way for adults in the community to help local elementary students succeed.

For one hour per week, community volunteers visit their lunch buddy's school to have lunch with them and share their talents.

Whether it's a craft, a passion for science, or teaching them how to play chess, students look up to their mentors, who in turn aim to encourage a 'can do' attitude.

Studies show, mentored students are more likely to have a better attitude toward school, achieve a higher GPA, and go to college.

"It's beneficial academically and for self-esteem," said Wehr.

And volunteers say they get a mood boost from making a difference in the life of a child.

Retirees often participate, as do employees from local companies such as Microsoft and Kirkland's Pilchuck Contractors, Wehr added. Some LINKS volunteers who were Lunch Buddies for elementary kids have stayed in touch with them as they moved up to junior high.

"Survey results showed that 100 percent of the teachers agreed all students in the LINKS program thrived academically and some emotionally, when receiving one-on-one assistance from LINKS volunteers," said Wehr.

At Redmond Junior High, Redmond High School and Juanita High, Spanish-speaking volunteers were especially needed to assist ELL (English Language Learner) students with math, science and reading skills, either in classrooms or at after-school meetings. Many other languages are spoken in the district, and volunteers fluent in a variety of languages are sought.

More info: www.lwsd.org, or contact Nanci Wehr at LINKS@lwsd.org or 425-702-3410.