MPSPride Monthly

Highland Park Edition

November 2015

"We're In This Together"

All Elementary Schools Now Have Family Resource Centers

Latasha Easterling-Turnquest is director of the district's FRC program and the coordinator at Bowers.

A helping hand can make a huge difference in life.

Latasha Easterling-Turnquest knows that as well as anyone.

Latasha is the director of our Family Resource Centers, which -- for the first time this year -- are in all nine of Manchester elementary schools. The FRCs provide an array of programs and services, from playgroups to parenting advice get-togethers, that are designed to strengthen the school-family-community partnership.

"We try to build bridges," Latasha says, "because we know we're all in this together."

FRCs serve all families -- a point Latasha emphasizes -- but can be especially helpful for parents or guardians who are single, or who don't speak English, or who face other challenges.

Latasha certainly understands about facing and overcoming obstacles. Her mother was 12 years old and in seventh grade when she became pregnant with Latasha. Her dad? Dad was mom's classmate -- and they were both in eighth grade when Latasha was born.

Latasha was raised by her grandparents but had her own challenges as an adult, as she became

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Inside

Glorious Menefee works with students at Verplanck as part of a before and after school program run in partnership by the school district and MELC.

An International Conference will be held at Manchester High School on Saturday, Nov. 14 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Extra Time, Extra Attention

Before School Or After, Students In Good Hands

The cafeteria at Highland Park Elementary School is a beehive of activity from 7-9 every morning, and 3:30 to 6 every afternoon. The same is true at the other eight elementary schools in town.

"And we like it that way," said Luis Moyano. "For many students, this is a very important part of their day."

Moyano, a school district administrator, and Jennifer DiMaso, of the Manchester Early Learning Center, are in charge of an unprecedented collaboration that is benefiting hundreds of students in kindergarten through fifth grade throughout the town.

But Moyano and DiMaso are quick to point out that they have plenty of help -- namely program managers, certified teachers and others who are the heart of BASP, which stands for Before and After School Programming.

Manchester has offered such programs in the past, but never at all of its K-5 schools and never with such an emphasis on aligning what students do during the day with the activities and support they get before and after school.

"We have put a lot of thought and planning into this program to make sure it really benefits the students," DiMaso said. "We hired nine full-time program managers to work in the schools during the day to help us connect better with the students. We want our staff to know the students and their teachers."

All students enrolled in grades K-5 in Manchester Public Schools are eligible. Students eat a light dinner, work on homework, and enjoy enrichment and recreational activities.

MELC has staff at each school during the day, and certified teachers work the afternoon shift providing homework support -- so the adults are able to work together and give students just they help that they need.

A monthly fee is required, but financial aid and scholarships are available through MELC.

"We are very excited about this new partnership," Moyano said, "and look forward to expanded enrichment opportunities for our students.

Alyssa Rancourt (above) is the program manager at Bowers Elementary School. Nicholas Savona (below) is program manager at Verplanck. "Being in the school during the day has helped build and develop my current relationship with the children in my program," he says. "It has also been a great way to bring new children into the program."

For More Information

Contact: Luis Moyano at 860.647.6364
or Jennifer DiMaso at 860.647.9659

A Celebration of Diversity

International Conference is Nov. 14 at MHS

A melting pot is defined as a place where different types of people live together and gradually create one community.

A place like Manchester.

About 6,000 students attend public schools in town, and they come from dozens of different countries – too many to count. However one measure of the diversity is found in our English Language Learner program, as students in those classes speak 37 different languages, from Akan to Arabic, Vietnamese to Visayan.

"The diversity in our community is truly a point of pride and a sign of strength," said Dr. Scott Ratchford, who will deliver the keynote speech at an International Conference being held at Manchester High School on Saturday, Nov. 14.

Ratchford is director of the school district's Office of Family and Community Partnerships, which is helping sponsor the conference. Other sponsors are the Association of Puerto Rican and Latino from Manchester and the district's ESL/bilingual program.

The International Conference is a "bigger and better" version of an event held last October that was called a Latino Family Conference.

"We've expanded it," said Memo Alejandro, who serves as co-president (with wife Amy) of APLUM. "We have so many people of other nationalities in Manchester and want everyone to feel welcome and invited."

The conference will run from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be workshops, exhibits and – of course – music and food from all around the world. There also will be door prizes, activities designed for children in grades 3-8, flu shots, even child care.

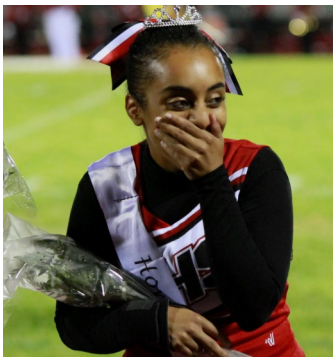
"We want people to feel welcome at the conference, just as we want them to feel welcome every day in our schools, and in our community in general," Ratchford said. "We are partners and all have the same goal – giving the children of Manchester the best possible education."

The pageantry from last year will be back on display at MHS on Nov. 14.

District Headlines

We became the first school district in New England to use Google's brand new Expeditions virtual field-trip technology.

Hundreds of Manchester students visited Center Memorial Park when "The Wall That Heals" came to town.



Rosanna Perez was named Homecoming Queen, a highlight of Homecoming Weekend.

For more on all this and lots more, visit:

Www.MPSPride.org

MPSPride Monthly

FRCs Are There For All Families

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pregnant at 19 and had to drop out of college. By age 23, she was a single mom with two children. Yes, she had a car, a job and an apartment -- but Latasha had tough sledding ahead.

She eventually married (and then had a third child), and earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees -- but she said she owes her successes to supports and resources that were available along the way.

Now, as the FRC director, she is in position to give something back.

"We want people to feel welcome in our schools and we get to be 'the good guys,'" she said, putting "air quotes" around that last phrase -- a reference to the reality that, in some cases, teachers and other school staff have to contact parents about, say, a child's poor grades or challenging behavior.

For years, there was just one FRC in Manchester -- at Washington Elementary School, funded by a state grant. Latasha worked there as the site coordinator from 2007 until last year, when she was named coordinator at Bowers and director for the entire town.

Her promotion was tied to the expansion of FRCs throughout town funded by the Alliance grant.

In September 2014, FRCs were created at Robertson, Verplanck, Waddell and Bowers. This January. Keeney and Martin added FRCs (sharing a coordinator) as did Buckley and Highland Park (also sharing a coordinator).

Every site has the same five-pronged approach. These components are: family engagement; outreach; playgroups; positive youth development; and resources and referrals.

Brittany Hall, who succeeded Latasha as coordinator at Washington, said she gets satisfaction from "rapport building with families" and "actually helping people take the next step toward achieving a goal, no matter how big or small it might be."

Brittany said sometimes she just helps find someone a form -- say, so they can sign up for a driving class. Other times, she says she can spend hours on the phone, trying to cut through red tape so that someone won't get unfairly evicted from their home.

Sean Webster, who splits time between Buckley and Highland Park, said that among his many tasks he schedules "lunch bunches" -- when parents and guardians come to school and eat alongside their child in Sean's office as he reads engaging stories.

"It's a nice bonding time," he said.

Renee Bryan, the coordinator at Waddell, noted that the FRCs are frequently collaborating -- not just with families but with school staff, representatives of the Manchester Early Learning Center (which helps with pre- and after-school care) and more. Renee is a member of committees at Waddell that work on climate, social thinking and PBIS. During meetings, she said, "I am there to represent the lenses of our families."

Latasha said there is ample evidence that the FRCS are effective in many ways -- but she said the most important testimony comes from the families themselves. She has a file of flattering letters that were collected when families were surveyed at the end of last year.

As one parent wrote: "It's so nice to know that parents can partake in a piece of the school day, can turn to someone for help, and can make new friends in a safe community and much more!"

Meet Your FRC Coordinator:

Sean Webster

Hello!

I have met many of you and look forward to getting to know as many people as possible in the Highland Park community.

As the accompanying story says, we offer a wide range of programs and resources and I am here to support all families — so please don't hesitate to contact me. Here is my contact information:

860-645-3337 ext. 70258
or
swebster@mpspride.org

Our goal is to ensure that all Highland Park students become lifelong learners and contributing members of society, and by working together we can make that happen.

All the best,

Sean