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Homework made easier

Two libraries offer the program, with more to follow

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TULSA LIBRARIES: AFTERSCHOOL HOMEWORK HELP DELIVERS

'For many of our students, we've found that just that consistency of an adult that is positive, supporting them, building up their confidence is really of primary importance.'

TRACY WARREN,

manager of community outreach and literary services for the library

Talk of lowest common denominators and square roots is emerging at some Tulsa



Volunteer Anita Glymour helps student Melissa Villa, 12, from Broken Arrow with homework during an after-school homework help program at South Broken Arrow Library on Thursday,

libraries.

Grammar and history and the periodic table of elements may also come up.

With worksheets and textbooks and pencils spread around them, a couple of middle-school students received one-on-one help with their homework at South Broken Arrow Library last week.

This month, the Tulsa City-County Library rolled out phase 2 of its After-school Homework Help Centers pilot program. The program — currently at two branches and

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expected to start at four more before the spring semester — offers free help to fourth-through eighth-grade students who attend a public school in the area around the libraries.

"One of our major goals is that the library will be a center of community, reading, lifelong learning and access to information for all," said Tracy

Afterschool Homework Help Centers

To sign up a child or to become a volunteer, contact program supervisor Fidelia Gonzales at 918-549-7667 or ahhctffitulsalibrary.org

Warren, manager of community outreach and literacy services for the library. "This (program) definitely falls in line with that."

The pilot program was launched last year at the South Broken Arrow Library.

Warren, who was manager of the Broken Arrow site at the time, said one of the reasons the branch was considered as a prime location to test the program was the community support and close relationship between the library and surrounding schools.

"And there is a really strong belief in education and the importance of that throughout the entire community," she said.

Through the 2012-13 school year, 43 students signed up for the service, with 27 of the students attending regularly. About a dozen volunteers put in 300 hours offering the one-on-one instruction.

Parents and students have been pleased with the After-school Homework Help Centers.

Melissa Villa, 12, has been attending one session a week since last year.

"I understand better, and my grades are improving," said Melissa, who gets help with her math homework.

Miriam Bryant calls the program awesome.

She's been bringing her 13-year-old daughter for tutoring in math — the only subject she has trouble with — since last year.

"She comes in kicking and screaming, with a frown on her face," Bryant said. "But then when she's here, she's real receptive to it. And her grades improved."

The success of the program last year led to its expansion this year, program supervisor Fidelia Gonzales said. Rudisill Regional Library's program started this month, and the homework help is expected to begin at Maxwell Park, Nathan Hale, Suburban Acres and Martin Regional by the spring semester.

"We chose libraries of varying sizes to allow us to pilot it at these locations so that we can make sure when we implement it across our system we have considered all of the factors necessary," Warren said.

Each homework assistance session is 35 minutes, and a student can sign up for one or two per week. The sessions are offered for about three hours after school Mondays through Thursdays.

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As more students sign up, Gonzales said she will recruit additional volunteers.

A \$30,000 AmeriCorps grant and \$20,000 from the Tulsa Library Trust are helping to fund the program this year. The grant will provide stipends to six AmeriCorps members to supervise the program at each site.

Gonzales said the volunteers providing homework assistance are often retired professionals — some who worked in academics and others who worked in industries related to the subjects that they help teach.

"We are able to supplement the expertise and knowledge of our volunteers with some of our online resources," Warren said.

Students are also encouraged to sign up for Homework Help Now, an online tutoring program that provides help for students in all grades. Live tutors are available to help students with any subject matter from 2 to 11 p.m. The service is free to users with a Tulsa library card.

Since the library signed up for the service about two years ago, it has been used about 18,000 times by Tulsa area residents.

In addition to the homework assistance, volunteers and students at the help centers have been forming positive relationships that further help students in other ways, Gonzales and Warren said.

"For many of our students, we've found that just that consistency of an adult that is positive, supporting them, building up their confidence is really of primary importance," Warren said.

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Austin Reed, Broken Arrow



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