

Tutor: Sunnyslane United Methodist parishioners fill vital role

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about.

"Each teacher takes a bit of themselves and incorporates it into the student without negating who the student is," she said.

It was up to those teachers who recommended those best suited for the limited spots available in the Whiz Kids program. Fourteen Highland Park students – ranging from 1st through 5th grade take part in Whiz Kids; there is a waiting list, Johns said.

"The teachers took their student referrals very seriously – they took into account the reading levels of the students but the need for mentoring as well," she said. "When I asked for applications or recommendations of students that needed to participate, I received a plethora of referrals – these not only are students who are reading below grade level but those who need a mentor."

Locating children to take part in the program was only one side of the equation, Johns said. One of the most crucial aspects



Whiz Kids site administrator Christy Johnson reviews materials with tutors before the most recent Whiz Kids one-on-one session. -Photo by Traci Chapman

of Whiz Kids success was finding the right mentors, people who would not only help children improve their reading skills, but who would also give enough of themselves to become an inspiration and example to their young partners.

That's where Sunnyslane United Methodist Church came in, Johns said.

"This program picks the students up at

Highland Park – the students stay onsite from 4 p.m. until 5:30, when they go to the church for their tutoring, and then the tutors take them home," she said.

Mentors are a much-needed commodity across all the schools taking part in Whiz Kids – especially a new partnership, like that between Highland Park and Sunnyslane United Methodist, site

administrator Christy Johnson said. As she works with Johns, church coordinator Paula Black and individual mentors, Johnson said she's always impressed with the dedication shown by those trying to make a difference in the lives of the children involved.

"It's amazing to see this, to experience and be a part of it," Johnson said. "What I would really like to express, though, is the need for more – many more – mentors, so we can help even more students."

For Johns, Cloud and the rest of Highland Park's staff and students, these early days of Whiz Kids are only the beginning of what they believe will be a long-term investment in children who just need a little extra time, extra care and belief they can succeed.

"Community involvement is key to any successful child," Johns said. "Whatever the school can do to foster the love of learning will only help later on."

To become a Whiz Kids mentor or for more information about the program, contact Johnson at christy@whizkidsok.org or 405-210-8011.

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