



Whiz Kids program coming to community

By Jennie Key • jkey@communitypress.com • September 24, 2010

If you don't know how to read by the end of fourth grade, the state of Ohio is building you a prison cell.

City Gospel Mission says Ohio uses third-grade reading proficiency scores to project future prison capacity. According to the U.S. Census, 80 percent of prison inmates are either low-level readers or illiterate.

City Gospel launched the Whiz Kids program in 2005 to counter the trend. Whiz Kids is designed to equip local churches to serve at-risk youth through one-to-one, literacy-based tutoring.

There are 46 Whiz Kids tutoring sites serving more than 1,100 youth throughout Greater Cincinnati. The partnership encompasses 60 elementary schools and 80 churches, with tutoring sites from the urban core neighborhoods of Over-the-Rhine and Price Hill to the I-275 loop communities of West Chester, Milford and Florence.

And now, the program is coming to three Northwest schools.

Three area churches are ready to support programs at the school buildings:

- * Monfort Heights United Methodist will partner with Monfort Heights Elementary,
- * Vineyard Northwest will pair up with Struble Elementary School and
- * White Oak Christian Church will work with Weigel Elementary School as part of the program.

Monfort Heights and Struble should be up and running sometime in October. Weigel is looking at a January start date.

The program is one-on-one after-school tutoring with an emphasis on reading for second and third graders.

Colerain Township resident Carol Strecker is the area director for Whiz Kids. She is setting up the programs in the three Northwest Local School District buildings and getting a cross cultural Hispanic Outreach with tutoring in reading and English at Roberts Academy in Price Hill.

Strecker says all volunteers will have background checks. She says she is hoping to have mentors for about 20 students at each building.

The mentors will attend training sessions, which will be offered in October, and again in January, before the Weigel program gets going.

Strecker says students will be recommended for the program by school staff. The criteria includes students on free and reduced lunch or students who are not grade level proficient in reading.

"There is also some leeway there for students who teachers or the principal think could benefit from time with an adult mentor," she said.

The requirements for volunteers are straight-forward: be there every week, read at a minimum of a third-grade level and be willing to spend time with kids.

"This is a walk-in situation," Strecker said. "There is nothing to prepare. Just show up and be ready to hang out with your student."

For more about the program, visit the City Gospel Mission's www.citygospelmission.com/whizkids.