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# New SWNA Tutoring Program Accelerates Learning at Amidon-Bowen

BY AVA MILLSTONE

It's cold outside on Dec. 4, but it's hot in the library upstairs at Amidon-Bowen Elementary School (ABES).

Math tutor Bryan Harris exclaims, "We're cooking with gas!" as 3rd grade student Tatianna, and her mother, Dayana Torres, both get the correct answer to the rounding problem they are working on. Across the table, Harris reaches out both hands for a three-way high five.

Harris is one of nine new tutors working with ABES 3rd grade students through a new initiative led by the SWNA Education and Scholarship Task Force.

Student performance in math has been improving at Amidon-Bowen. The percentage of students scoring on grade level on the national PARCC test doubled from 2017 to 2018. But, 45% of first through fifth grade students still entered this school year more than two years behind in Math. (This is down from 61% in 2016).

The tutoring program was started by Robert St. Cyr, executive director of Community Scholar, at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan and expanded this year to Amidon-Bowen. After discussing the project with SWNA leaders Bruce Levine, Vyllorya Evans and Thelma Jones, St. Cyr worked with Murali Balji to recruit volunteers in the Southwest community.

From there, the team coordinated with school administration and teachers to get the program going. Kayla Winters, ABES math interventionist, invited parents for an informational breakfast and was responsible for recruiting all the students in the math program. Zip Zap IT Solutions, SWBID and Westminster Church provided initial funding for books and materials.

Eighteen students and nine tutors are currently participating in Math tutoring. Students meet with their tutors once or twice a week to learn critical 3rd



Photo by Author

Tatianna Torres, Bryan Harris and Dayana Torres

grade math skills like rounding, telling time, and fractions. Winters says that students in the program are seeing dramatic improvements in the classroom. Some have moved into the advanced math group and are even helping to teach their peers.

One hallmark of the program is family engagement. Parents are encouraged to attend tutoring sessions with their children and receive weekly videos, to watch with their child, that explain the Math concepts. Torres, who attends the program weekly with her daughter Tatianna, says, "This program is excellent because they give the tools not only to the students, but also to the parents to help them learn at home and take the students to excellence."

Harris—a member of the SW community for 13 years—said he wishes a similar program had been available to him growing up. "Working with kids

who have an interest in learning is important to me," he said. "These kids are smart and capable—the tutoring provides a little something extra. It reassures them."

Stacy Cloyd, who has lived in SW since 2009, has enjoyed building a relationship with the student she tutors, Irie Cantarella. "It's really interesting to meet someone in the neighborhood I would not have met otherwise," says Cloyd. "It's really impressive—the math they are doing is a lot harder than the math I did in third grade."

Thanks to all of the Southwest tutors for their valuable contributions to our neighborhood school: Rick Bardach, Grace Byrd, Stacy Cloyd, Sadia Fatiemi, Diana Finegold, Diane Ford, Peri Hamlin, Bryan Harris, Audrey Hinton, Valerie Lubrano, Alan Philpott, Diane Reeves, Garon Reeves, Joelle Rudney and Jacqui Stark.

The program is still accepting students! If you have a third grader who attends Amidon-Bowen Elementary School, please talk to Ms. Winters or Ms. Cureton, or email [Kayla.Winters@dc.gov](mailto:Kayla.Winters@dc.gov).

To learn more about the program or sign up to participate as a volunteer, contact Robert St. Cyr at [friends@communityscholar.org](mailto:friends@communityscholar.org).

To make a tax-deductible donation to support the program, visit <https://www.mightycause.com>, search for Southwest Neighborhood Assembly Inc. and select the SWNA Education Task Force as the recipient. You can also write a check to the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, note "Education Fund" in the memo line and mail it to: SWNA Attn: Education Fund, PO Box 70131, Washington, DC 20024.

## CONVERSATION

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lives on a daily basis. However, we must acknowledge that we learn from the parts of the story we choose to focus on. If day-in-and-day-out we are solely focused on all the possible bad in the world, which there are ample amounts of, then we are limiting the amount of good we allow our-

selves to see in the world.

The event featured many captivating speakers. One was Jon Grinspan, the historian, who explained that at The Smithsonian, they study the past while preparing the future to study us. Another was Hawah Kasat, the educator with many additional titles, who believes in human ingenuity and that we are a remarkably resilient species. Or there was C. Brian Williams, the artist who believes the arts

should be used as a platform to bring cultures together. What all the speakers at the event have in common is the ability to see the bigger picture—the ability to acknowledge societal downfalls and shortcomings while still possessing hope for the future.

Some days it may be hard to be hopeful about the future of our country, or the world as a whole. However, The Long Conversation 2018 taught us that even if our daily encounters make it challenging

to find hope regarding the future, that doesn't mean we should fear the future. Let's keep the conversation going; put the phones down, engage in conversation, and figure out what it is that makes you tick and what gives you a glimmer of hope towards the future. By engaging in these conversations, it helps us imagine not what can go wrong in the world, but rather what can go right.