

Project Tutor

*Boise School District
Boise, Idaho*

A virtual army of tutors descended on students in the Boise School District last year to help battle declining test scores. As part of the district's new Project Tutor program, 60 volunteer tutors partnered with 200 Boise students to help raise their grades and their test-taking confidence levels.

District administrators came up with the idea for the tutoring program in 2006 when they realized that their Federal Programs Office ran a similar initiative. For years, Boise schools conducted a series of family workshops designed to increase parental involvement to support students' homework completion. The federal office was looking for a way to recruit volunteers to help students in their schools.

Prior to the tutoring program, many schools lacked volunteers. District and federal offices sought ways to increase the volunteer pool. The new tutoring program combined the district's past recruitment efforts with new training that would spread volunteers to schools throughout the district.

Originally the leaders approached 10 schools that had low scores in reading and math. Six of the schools were in the Title I program. They began recruiting volunteers from the community through advertisements in the local newspaper, community newsletters, in a retirement community, and by word of mouth. Schools asked that volunteers commit to 2 hours of work per week.

Once recruited, volunteers had to pass a background check—paid for by the district—and attend a training session, last September. At the session, staff asked volunteers to note when they were available to assist students. District leaders worked hard to place all 60 volunteers at schools by the beginning of October.

In addition to resolving scheduling issues, staff presented volunteers with good information on math and reading instruction and introduced them to basic elements of these

curricula. The volunteers also received a kit of materials which included lessons plans and activities to help them through the 30 weeks of school at their placement. The reading and math specialists associated with the district designed the kits to match the school curricula.

From September to June, volunteers worked to boost children's grades and confidence in activities with students on skills including graphing in math, synonyms in language arts, and summary games in reading.

"My Project Tutor students now participate in class more often," a teacher said. "All four of the Project Tutor reading students in my classroom increased their scores on their reading standardized test," commented another teacher.

The project cost \$8,000 to implement, mainly for start-up costs, such as designing the tutor kits. The school used grant money from a local foundation and Title I funds to cover the expenses.

The school will continue the tutoring project next year. District leaders plan to partner with a local university to boost the number of tutors, add administrative support for volunteers, and tighten requirements for schools to join.

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