

# Nonprofit working to help kids get good grades

BY SARA BRUESTLE

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For 50 years, Jan Link's mantra has been: "Learning should not stop when the last school bell rings."

Link, of Mukilteo, is the founder of a nonprofit organization with the goal of providing struggling students with the "outside the school day" academic support they need to succeed.

She is a retired school teacher, principal and curriculum director who worked for five school districts in two states throughout her career.

Link, 74, founded Academic Link Outreach in 2006 to provide Washington state schools with programs that support the academic needs of students outside the classroom.

"I want to help any student who is not passing the state test or who is not getting good grades," she said. "I want to help them be accountable and responsible for their education."

The nonprofit is hosting an Educational Gala & Dinner Auction on Friday, May 29, at Rosehill Community Center to promote its newest program - Learning Labs.

Learning Labs work like a free tutoring center at middle schools to help students finish missing assignments and meet test standards.



Photo courtesy of Larry Wewel

Academic Link Outreach received a grant from the South Everett-Mukilteo Rotary Club on May 8. Pictured are: Jim Stephanson, Jan Link and Cassie Franklin.

The after-school labs would be open from 2:30-6 p.m. every day after school and be staffed by a program coordinator and 5-7 trained volunteers.

"Right now, if children don't turn their work in, the teacher will let them turn it in tomorrow and dock points," Link said. "Then, if they still don't turn it in, they'll get a zero on that assignment."

"Once they start getting zeros,

they give up. I saw it happen over and over again."

If these children had access to a Learning Lab after school, Link said they wouldn't be at risk of failing.

"If you see that a child is starting to fall, and you pop them back up, you can see that it feels good," Link said. "After they get caught back up, they have this big smile on their faces. They're relieved because someone has helped

them."

Link said Learning Lab volunteers would help students with their homework, when oftentimes teachers can't.

"Teachers do not have the time to do that," she said. "In middle school, they have 150 students per day. They don't have the time to seek out a student to get them to turn their work in. That's why that system needs to be there."

Link said the program works

with the educational system to help students meet and exceed standards, graduate from high school, and better prepare for college or the workforce.

The expectation of all students in the program would be that they earn a 3.0 or higher - and that none of their grades would be D's or F's.

Link developed the Learning Lab program after studying the successes and failures of students in middle school through PATH to College Success.

With the help of College Sparks Washington, she followed the academic progress of 50 students in middle school. The students were selected at random from the Edmonds School District.

For three years, Academic Link Outreach provided the support and motivation the students needed to have success in school. Volunteers monitored their grades, teamed up with parents and rewarded them for their good grades.

If they were struggling, students received tutoring help to bring their grades back up, as well as how to be smart when studying and taking tests.

Thanks to the extra help, 90 percent of all students grades - 290 of them - were either A's or B's over three years from 2010-2013. Sixteen of those 50 students

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earned straight A's. Not one student got an F, and there were a total of just three D's.

In addition, nearly every student scored a 3, which is passing, or a 4, which is above standard on the HSPE state assessment test.

"The Learning Lab program is PATH on steroids," said Larry Wewel, one of 15 Academic Link Outreach board members. "PATH offered help one day a week, and this could be an opportunity five days a week. This program ought to be phenomenal if it is implemented in the school system."

"Hundreds, if not thousands of kids, could benefit from this."

Academic Link Outreach volunteers are meeting with principals, vice principals, counselors, teachers and school boards to promote the program and garner statewide support.

"One of the problems is basic education is considered 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.," she said. "This opens them up to the idea that school is more than that. This is not an

added on program, this is an integral part. It's making the school's programs work better."

Want to learn more about Learning Labs?

The first Educational Gala, scheduled for 6-10 p.m. Friday, May 29, will feature a catered dinner and silent and live auctions.

The event will be held at Rosehill Community Center, at 304 Lincoln Ave. in Mukilteo. Tickets are \$85.

For more information, call Jan Link at 425-613-6500 or email her at jan@academiclink.us. Or visit academiclinkoutreach.mae-stroweb.com.

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