

# Project ZAM (Zoo and Me)

Blue Springs School District, Blue Springs, Missouri

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

In response to a decrease in state funding for early childhood education, the district sought out different revenue sources to help pay for the school readiness needs of children and their families. Project ZAM was funded through a private grant and district money. Preschoolers and their parents attend one Saturday morning session a month at the district. The children learn about different zoo animals through a partnership with the Kansas City Zoo. Parents receive materials and guidance on how to work with their children at home on various kindergarten readiness skills. The program culminates in a visit to the zoo, including rides and a family lunch.

Some of the children had never experienced going to the zoo, much less seeing animals in a small group setting and learning about their characteristics. All themes were carried out with not only the zoo but with take-home literacy

books, crafts, and practice that continued the learning experience. Snacks also were themed-based each monthly Saturday.

Project ZAM allowed participating children to be identified for services with a free health screening, and in some instances for assistance for further free medical services. Screenings were conducted by district staff, including Parents as Teacher educators, Title 1 teachers, evaluation specialists, RNs, social workers, regular classroom teachers, and counselors, which allowed for a more intensive screening process.

## THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The Blue Springs Board of Education understands the value of early childhood education and has challenged district staff to find ways to identify and serve the youngest learners. The board established goals that included finding ways to assist at-risk families with educational experiences. Board support of this

program has included attending Project ZAM events, assisting with projects, and promoting the initiative in the community. Board members approved the funding to match the Jelly Family Endowment grant. These funds over two years provided staff for screenings, facilities for events, and transportation for families. The board held its summer meeting at the Kansas City Zoo and participated in a hands-on experience in addition to talking with the zoo curator about the partnerships with the district.

## RESULTS

More than 90 young children increased their knowledge, skills, and awareness. They participated in structured and unstructured activities that address the developmental needs of preschoolers. Students worked to improve language development, literacy, numbers and counting, social and emotional development, and physical development.

Each child underwent a free developmental screening to determine if there were any deficits. Once the screening was completed, a parent intake was conducted and a member of the district team gave caregivers specific information about their child. As a result, 12 percent of children were referred for further testing and services. These children were given the resources to assist them in their development.

## CONTACT

Deputy Superintendent  
**Annette Seago**

aseago@bssd.net  
www.bssd.net



## Kids on the Move

Hazelwood School District, Florissant, Missouri

### ABOUT THE PROGRAM

In support of the school district's No.1 goal of increasing student achievement, the school board sought a way to recognize students who excelled in the classroom, in extracurricular activities, and in the community. The Kids on the Move monthly program recognizes student achievement through nominations submitted by teachers, coaches, troop leaders, administrators, parents, and community leaders. This format provides an opportunity to recognize more student achievement.

### THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

At the beginning of the school year, all school board members sign up for a given month to represent the school board by traveling around to the designated schools for that particular month. The board member serves as the host of that month's Kids on the Move program. They recognize between 20 and 30 students, covering eight to 10 schools across the district per month. The recognition program is filmed by the communications department, then added to the school district's website, posted on social media, and aired on the district's cable channel. In addition, a letter and a copy of the DVD is mailed to the parents/guardians of the children who were recognized.

### RESULTS

In October 2016, the school board recorded its record-breaking 100th episode of the Kids on the Move program. Within a nine-year period, the board has recognized thousands of students.



### CONTACT

Director of Communications  
**Kimberly McKenzie**

[kmckenzie@hazelwoodschools.org](mailto:kmckenzie@hazelwoodschools.org)  
[www.hazelwoodschooldistrict.org](http://www.hazelwoodschooldistrict.org)



# New Horizons

Hilliard City Schools, Columbus, Ohio

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The 625 students at Hilliard Horizon Elementary School come from 15 different countries and speak 16 different languages. They come from a community where half of the families live in poverty. Teachers noticed that students were lacking experiences outside of the school walls, and developed New Horizons in partnership with community organizations. This after-school program, offered at no charge to students, is based on youth development activities.

Students can choose from 100 different enrichment courses ranging from computer coding, cake decoration, cooking, robotics Legos, creativity, cricket, and oceanography. A before-school program called Power Hour helps students who need academic help on specific skills through small group instruction. A community organization provides a teacher to hold classes for parents after school to teach conversational English. The teacher also gives parents tips on parent-teacher conferences and navigating the computer system to access grades.

Parents run nearly 25 percent of the programming offered at the school. Before this program started, parents felt as if they did not have the expertise to lead a group of students. However, because of parent engagement programs, the parents have shared their careers and job passions with the Hilliard Horizon Community.

## THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board has supported New Horizons from the beginning of the



Straight A grant application throughout the implementation in this second year of programming. The board has visited both the before- and after-school programs. The board has highlighted New Horizons at meetings and in front of community members many times. It has worked with several media outlets as well to publish information and news stories about this program.

## RESULTS

Math scores rose, on average, 300 points due to the programs offered. Reading levels increased, on average, by three levels during the school year. The biggest difference is that the students

feel like they have a place where they belong. They are safe and secure at school, where people care about them and want them to succeed. Of the 35 teachers who work at Hilliard Horizon, 97 percent work in the before- or after-school program. In addition, 100 percent of the staff support the work in the out-of-school programming.

## CONTACT

Director of Communication  
**Stacie Raterman**

Stacie\_Raterman@hboe.org  
www.hilliardschools.org

# Tot SPOT

Topeka Public Schools, Topeka, Kansas



## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Topeka Public Schools (TPS) has experienced an 11 percent increase in families who are living on a low income, to the current 76.68 percent. The district provides preschool intervention services, but many families weren't taking advantage of it.

The program involved the repurposing of a van which was scheduled to be retired as a service van in 2016-17. With authorization from the school board, several employees at the TPS service center enthusiastically contributed to transform a simple, "retired" van into a child-friendly, primary-colored, polka-dotted, mobile therapy unit. This repurposing kept the van in use as a

therapy delivery venue for speech/language, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and early childhood services. Tot SPOT relieved the parents, overcoming transportation and attendance issues created by low socioeconomic circumstances. At this time, the TPS speech/language department is serving 449 preschoolers at 78 sites. Tot SPOT is able to deliver services to students as their parents watch and participate in the mobile therapy room. Absenteeism is decreased, and a relationship is fostered between the parent and the professional staff.

## THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

The school board monitors key components to ensure opportunities to foster

relationships among staff, students, families, and the community. In addition, it encourages creative minds to analyze need, appraise resources, and devise viable solutions. This attentiveness to need and affirmation of employee ideas is reflected by their enthusiastic support for this "out-of-the-box" service. The members of the board have attentively kept their collective "finger on the pulse," monitoring these components to ensure opportunities for continued personal relationships between staff and students, their families, and the community while meeting their ever-growing needs.

## RESULTS

Tot SPOT has had only 40 school days of activity by which to measure success. The first goal accomplished was to create an effective, family-friendly, affordable mobile therapy unit to meet our needs and to provide a model for other districts that are facing the same challenges with onsite services to preschoolers, limited budgets, and inefficient time use due to speech/language pathology vacancies. TPS is able to deliver services in the neighborhoods without breaching the FERPA rights of the students by naming the Tot SPOT with an acronym.

## CONTACT

Communications Specialist  
**Megan Ackerman**

mackerman@tps501.org  
www.topekapublicschools.net



# Beyond Textbooks

Vail Unified School District, Vail, Arizona

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Beyond Textbooks (BT) is a comprehensive program of curriculum development, instructional improvement, student assessment, and intervention. It starts with standards: what students must learn. Next, a team of teachers and administrators “unwraps” documents to define what “good enough” looks like when students need to demonstrate an understanding of any particular state standard. From there, the team develops curriculum calendars for when the different standards will be taught and for how long. Then teachers are given liberty to figure out what specific materials and resources are needed for instruction. A wiki serves as a digital version of the curriculum as it is developed by instructors and content specialists. Other key elements include common formative assessments to check students’ mastery of the standards and an opportunity to reteach or enrich as part of daily interventions based on data collected from formative and quarterly benchmark assessments.

BT has completely changed the way the district does business. First, it digitized curriculum, making changes much more efficient. Long gone are the days of a curriculum change coming from the district office in the form of papers that had to replace old ones in every curriculum binder for every grade level at every school in a district. Each site once had a person in charge of all those curriculum binders who collected and updated them every year. When new standards come out, teachers and administrators are no longer



stuck in a conference room spending days preparing for the upcoming year by stuffing the mountain of binders. Educators link in to BT. All have access to every “binder,” which is updated in real time. BT allows teachers to do the things that really matter: differentiated instruction, reteaching ideas, and building connections with students and parents.

## THE BOARD'S INVOLVEMENT

Board members were involved in BT from the initial meetings in 2008. They provided full backing. They outlined specific goals on how to digitize the curriculum. One such goal was to have all core subjects up and running online in one year. They raised funds to get technology in every classroom in the district. Once the program was launched, the board continued to support it with goals attached to performance pay. When the board stood behind BT, the program grew and found solid roots. When Vail was approached about sharing its new

digital instructional playbook, the board strongly encouraged it. Vail was making academic strides it had never seen, and the board wanted to help others. The board continues to present the program around the nation.

## RESULTS

Vail went from being average in 2000, to being ranked as the top-performing district in the state of Arizona for the first two years the ranking system was in place. As the state rankings continued, districts continued to rise. At one point, three of the top five districts in the state were using BT. And, as BT has branched out beyond the state borders, similar results have been experienced. As such, since 2010, the BT staff has provided over 1,765 trainings across Arizona and beyond.

## CONTACT

Chief Executive Officer  
**Kevin Carney**

[carneyk@vailschooldistrict.org](mailto:carneyk@vailschooldistrict.org)  
[www.vailschooldistrict.org](http://www.vailschooldistrict.org)