



The Watch DOGS program gives students access to positive male role models at school

# Cy-Fair WATCH DOGS

A spotlight on dads of great students at Cy-Fair ISD campuses and the lasting impact male role models can make

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Watch DOGS, or Dads of Great Students, are male father-figures who volunteer at school. In Cy-Fair ISD, dozens of campuses participate and have seen the benefits of having positive male role models on campus.

## Breaking Barriers

Keith Elementary School's counselor Charlotte Miller has seen their campus' program prove to be a success. "Prior to the Watch DOGS program coming to Keith, we didn't see many dads at the school volunteering during the school day, or even to come eat lunch with their child. Our goal was to change that," says Miller. Now the campus has one or two volunteers on campus every single day of the school year.

Pam Handsborough is the behavior interventionist at Holbrook Elementary School and notes the positive results of having dads on campus. "With our children being bombarded with all kinds of negative male images through traditional and social media, they need positive examples of what real men say and do," Handsborough says. "Being a

volunteer not only supports their own individual student, but positively affects students throughout the campus."

Sandra Burns is the behavior interventionist at Copeland Elementary and serves as their Watch DOGS coordinator. "Many parents are hesitant to volunteer because they are intimidated by the school atmosphere," says Burns. "We work to break down those barriers and make the parents feel welcome."

## Helping Students Succeed

Watch DOGS walk the hallways and visit classrooms, making a lasting difference through the power of their presence. Thornton Middle School is in their first year as part of the program. Principal Reggie Mitchell says, "I want our kids who may not have the greatest relationships with their fathers to be inspired."

Volunteer Timothy Mitchell has four children, two of whom are students at Thornton Middle School. He joined with the



Counselor Charlotte Miller, Jon Colman, Tom Nally, and Principal Cheryl Fisher with students at Keith Elementary School



Watch DOG Charles Ferdin with son Gabriel at Holbrook Elementary School

*There are currently 34 Cy-Fair ISD schools that have the Watch DOGS program*



Watch DOGS James Toney and Reece Hall with Principal Michelle Rice at Copeland Elementary School



Watch DOG volunteers Kenoel Bureson, Raul Salazar, Henry Donahoe, Enrique Hernandez, and Charles Ferdin with Principal Yvette Garcia at Holbrook

desire to make a lasting difference in teen's lives. "I'm able to make the students happy and confident and help them solve their issues," Timothy says.

From helping with science experiments, playing games at recess, practicing spelling words, to solving math problems, these dads truly have fun while making a difference.

### Providing a Powerful Presence

David Evans has two children who attend Keith Elementary School, Konnor and Kinley. After his children begged him to become a volunteer for a couple of months, he figured he would give it a try. Now there's no turning back. "Not only do you get to spend time with your own children, but you get to be involved in so many other lives," says Evans. "The excitement and joy on the kids' faces and in their voices gives you such a great feeling, I wish I could participate every week."

In addition to time with his children, Evans says it's deepened his understanding of school leadership. "It has given me that much more of an appreciation of what goes into running a school and how much the staff truly cares about the kids and molding them into their future selves," says Evans.

Burns has also seen academic improvement across the campus. "When students see their parents involved at school, they are more successful," she says. "Academic achievement increases, discipline decreases, and it's a win-win for students, staff, and parents." According to Burns, many dads volunteer on their child's birthday - making the experience extra special.

Careful attention is given to pairing Watch DOGS with students who might need special attention from a father figure. "Our teachers do a great job picking students to work with the dads who might need a male figure in their life, due to divorce or death," Miller adds.

### Getting Involved

To get involved in a program, volunteers must be a father, grandfather, uncle, or guardian of a Cy-Fair ISD student in a participating school. Throughout the year, Watch DOGS also help host special events like donuts with dad, pizza night, and launch events to strengthen campus involvement.

At Copeland Elementary School, they hosted a pizza kick-off party to start the school year. "We had over 500 dads and students in attendance," says Burns. By the end of the night, the campus had a volunteer signed up for every single day of the school year. The program at Holbrook Elementary School also help with field day and the fifth-grade party, where Watch DOGS grill burgers and hot dogs for students.

Students love their Watch DOGS, and their growing popularity is infectious. "The children are so excited about the program that they are constantly encouraging their dads to participate," Miller says. "He picked a day, and they now have it on the calendar counting down to the date." CFM

*KENNAN BUCKNER is proud of dads and role models like the Watch DOGS for their commitment to guide tomorrow's leaders.*