

SPOTLIGHT ON: Patrick Henry Reading Specialist Karen Evans

Retired Corporate Executive Builds New Career as a Reading Specialist

When you enter the doors of Patrick Henry Downtown Academy, there is no mistaking that this elementary school is serious about reading. When students arrive, they notice the reading nook in the hall just outside of the main office. When they leave for the day, there is a take-home book station at the exit. If that was not enough to show the school team's dedication to reading and literacy, they have a secret weapon.

Meet Karen Evans, Patrick Henry's Reading Specialist. "If anyone in this school -- student, teacher, or parent -- needs assistance when it comes to reading, tell them to come and see Ms. Evans. I'll get them straight," she laughed.



Reading Specialist Karen Evans is a retired corporate project manager now enjoying a second career and making a difference at Patrick Henry Elementary.

Karen Evans, the daughter of a retired SLPS teacher, began her teaching career in 2008 after retiring as a project manager from AT&T. Students who come see Ms. Evan for reading help get much more than that. "I brought the knowledge and tools from the corporate world into my classroom. My students use spreadsheets to keep track of sight words (common words) and I help them create PowerPoint presentations to assist with reading comprehension. When my students leave me, they leave with confidence and skills that will help them for years to come," explained Ms. Evans.

Ms. Evans uses many different tools and techniques to help her young readers including chopsticks to point out sight words and hand puppets to reinforce retention and comprehension. She keeps a file on every student who steps through her door and she works tirelessly to address areas of opportunity and to reinforce individual strengths. She sends her students home with books to read and talks to parents and caregivers about building good reading habits. "I talk to parents. I talk to grandparents. I talk to sports coaches. I talk to anyone who touches the lives of my students and impress upon them the importance of reading. Reading is the foundation for everything you do in life."

Patrick Henry Principal, Dr. Deborah Rogers said, "Karen Evans is one of those staff members who does it all. She has arrival and dismissal duty, she supervises classrooms in a pinch, she is our testing coordinator and she is even our Building Steward for Local 420. She also has the unique title of 'Reading Specialist.'"

"Ms. Evans systematically approaches our students' reading growth through a series of assessments that allows her to collect enough data on students to not only place them effectively into their reading groups, but also to track their progress efficiently and make changes in real-time," said Rogers. "Her obsession with data pays off with results in student reading growth largely because her time with them is tailored to meet each individual students' needs."

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Karen Evans – Add One

Rogers explains that Ms. Evans is also part of Patrick Henry’s school-wide effort to make literacy a focal point, which explains the literacy spaces in every “nook and cranny” throughout the building. In addition, Rogers said, “We are (presently) expanding each of these spaces to encourage our students to find joy and comfort in reading throughout their school day. Our community partners have fundraised for us and gifted us with an incredible amount of resources that our teachers like Ms. Evans, are putting to great use!”

Ms. Evans is also great at putting her own talents to use in a second career that allows her to contribute in a meaningful way, at a school that is special to her. As the daughter of a former SLPS teacher, Ms.

Evans’ says her love for reading and education has been with her for as long as she can remember. In fact, she said her mother, predicted her child would become a teacher one day. And, wouldn’t you know, Evans said, “When I accepted my first job after Teach for America, it was in the same school and in the same grade my mother taught.” Somehow, she said, “My mother knew.”



Ms. Karen Evans teaches first graders how to recognize and sound out words. She not only builds an appreciation for reading among her students, she makes sure that they walk out of her classroom not only as confident readers, but also, confident learners.

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