

EDUCATION

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Monday, March 20, 2017 | The Daily News | Section B



Jennifer Reynolds/The Daily News

Elizabeth Turner, left, executive director and founder of SMART Family Literacy, teaches Janice Statum, her granddaughter, Jasmine, Jordan Roach, McKenzie Garrett and Amanda Crawford about growing tomatoes on March 13 during an event at Greater Barbour's Chapel Baptist Church in Texas City. The church is working with the literacy organization to teach new neighbors in the Oaks at Blue Jay Drive about gardening and the importance of reading to children.

Planting seeds through education

By ANGELA WILSON
The Daily News

SMART Family Literacy Inc. and the Barbour's Chapel Community Development Corp., have teamed up to offer educational programming for families in Galveston County, particularly residents of the new Blue Jay Drive neighborhood, in Texas City.

The two local nonprofits will be offering "parties" for families with young children ages 6 months to 6-years-old that include free books, as well as hands-on science and art activities. Financial literacy and health and nutrition classes for all ages will be available, and there even will be vegetable garden

classes to help residents in the Blue Jay Drive neighborhood grow their own food items.

Elizabeth Turner, founder and executive director of SMART Family Literacy Inc., has a passion for helping kids and families. Turner believes children's books are power tools for building healthy young minds; and with that knowledge of books and vegetable gardens, it can help to improve kids' education and health in a positive and fun way.

"SMART Family Literacy is in its 13th year of literacy outreach and vegetable education," Turner said. "Last year, we gave more than 16,000 children's books in the Galveston

County area. People like our SMART Family Parties, because they have fun while learning practical things and getting to know each other, too. Usually we work with school gardens to teach families to grow their own food, but we're excited about the Blue Jay Drive and Barbour's Chapel collaboration, partly because it's a new approach."

That new approach, designed by developers, DSW Homes, includes edible landscaping such as citrus fruit trees and garden frames, instead of the usual ornamentals that you may find in housing developments or subdivisions.

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Jennifer Reynolds/The Daily News

Jasmine Statum picks out a book to take home Monday during a SMART Family Literacy event at Greater Barbour's Chapel Baptist Church in Texas City.

Women's History Month: Honoring trailblazers in labor and business

In honor of Women's History Month, the college will host two public talks as trendsetting women in industry and health care share their stories, setbacks and successes.

Dr. Joan Nichols, who works the first lab to grow human lungs, will speak from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. March 28 in the College of the Mainland Learning Resources Center Auditorium, 1200 Amburn Road, in Texas City. She will share her TED Talk: "High Risk Research with Breathtaking Results: Bioengineering Lungs for Clinical Use."

Karen Kupsa, Union Carbide and Dow process operator for more than 30 years and COM process technology

Inside COM

Inside COM is compiled by the communications office at College of the Mainland.

professor, will speak on changing women's role in industry from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at the same location.



Angela Wilson

Karen Kupsa started her career when few women were in process technology,

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"These women have both done so much," said professor Michelle Cortez, co-organizer of the event. "Karen

Dickinson ISD is now a District of Innovation

Dickinson Independent School District students and staff do innovative things in classrooms each day. Several have been highlighted this school year with the district theme, "Innovation in Gator Nation," including articles and videos about our new STEM Academy, anti-bullying programs, technology integration, financial literacy program and the district's student athletic trainers.

Another way districts are being given more freedom and flexibility to be innovative is by becoming a "District of Innovation." The Texas Legislature created this process two years ago to allow public school districts to exempt themselves from some parts of the Texas Education Code by adopting an innovation plan.

While school districts are not allowed to exempt themselves from statutes involving curriculum and graduation requirements

Guest Column



Independent School District.

or academic and financial accountability, they can exempt themselves from several other areas which lessen the burden on the school district.

After going through a lengthy process, the district officially became a District of Innovation with approval by the board of trustees on March 6. Later in the same meeting, the board approved the school district calendar for 2017-18, which is one of nine exemptions included in the District of Innovation Plan.

The Texas Legislature prevents school districts from starting the new school year

before the fourth Monday in August, which by the 2017 calendar means the earliest start date would be Aug. 28. Starting this late makes it nearly impossible to end the first semester before the Christmas break and means the last day of school would be pushed to about the second week of June.

By claiming the school calendar as an exemption, we have the flexibility to adjust the school calendar to meet the needs of district students, parents and staff.

The first day of school for students in 2017-18 will be Aug. 22, which allows the district to end the first semester in December and finish the school year on May 25, 2018. This is the first time in many years for the district to end the year before Memorial Day.

Most of the student holidays during the year are the same as previous years. In December, students and staff will end the first

semester a little later than other years on Dec. 20, but students will not return to school until Jan. 8.

Other exemptions included in the District of Innovation Plan are related to the length of the school day; teacher certification in the areas of English Language Learners, Career and Technical Education and Special Education; teacher appraisal system; contracts for teachers hired after the start of the school year; student/teacher ratios and class sizes; professional development; designation of a Campus Behavior Coordinator; and school district depositories.

The district is excited about having increased flexibility and local control to make several of these decisions, which in the past were out of our control. The district will continue to research other allowed exemptions to see if they would be a good fit to include in the District of Innovation Plan in the future.