

Inside Their World: Parent Involvement Educators

Kim Williams is one of two Parent Involvement Educators at Phalen Leadership Academy, an IPS innovation school on the city's east side.

It's a job that she calls a "blessing."

As we prepare for a new school year, Williams, the mother of three, reflects on her job, the work she does with students and their parents and how she wants to get more involved with the families that the school serves.

How long have you been with Phalen?

I will be starting my second year at Phalen once school starts back in August.

What's your background? What did you do before Phalen?

Before Phalen, I was at Fall Creek Academy as the director of Student Services. Prior to that, I was at IPS' Manual High School for five years, where I was a behavior interventionist and graduation coach. This year, I wanted to take a step back to spend more time with my children; I wanted to do more at home.

Tell us about your college degrees.

I have a bachelor's degree in Physical Education and Sports Medicine. I was an athletic trainer for a few years at Ridgeview High School in Bakersfield, Calif.; I always loved counseling and working with student athletes. I was always the trainer saying "What do your grades look like?" as I'm stretching you — always motivating them and things like that. I love sports, but I ended up getting my teaching license.

I was the director of community engagement in California for Kern High School District at Bakersfield High School before we moved here. I was the community engagement and graduation coach out in California for three years. I took my group of students from freshman year to senior year, and I had almost 100 percent of them graduating. I came here and applied for the position of graduation coach at another school and it all came together. I got my teaching license — my masters in teaching from Marian University. I love high school. I love the kids. This is my first year in elementary, but it's not that different because I'm working with parents and a lot of them are young parents, so I'm doing a lot of the same services like mentoring.

As a Parent Involvement Educator (PIE), what are your responsibilities?

I book all transportation. If there are issues with a bus, I call down to transportation to figure out what's going on. I schedule field trips and early dismissals.



I'm in charge of bringing in outside agencies and community partners that come in to help with programming for families and kids. I do some behavior intervention, because I have a background in that — some conflict mediations. I have a certificate in conflict mediations. I work with a social worker; I do home visits and go out into the community. I do a lot of community engagement.

How does the behavior intervention help students and the school as a whole?

We have a lot of scholars that show signs of big stressors in their lives — possibly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), though it hasn't been officially diagnosed. Coming in, we had to learn how to work with those kids and talk them through it. How to disengage them versus engage them and making sure they're not riled up in certain situations. That's something that everyone at the school had to do with guidance from professionals like the team at Peace Learning Center.

What does success look like when you're dealing with those intense situations?

Success in the moment is getting the child to stay calm and to let them know we're there to support them. We aim for them to walk out on their own in that moment instead of continuing to keep screaming or expressing anger.

Are there any tasks you've taken on that might surprise people?

If I notice a student is wearing the same shirt for a few days, I will give them a shirt and take theirs to wash it. At the end of the day they will give me mine back so they will have it fresh and clean for the next few days. I've also talked to parents and asked "What's going on with the washer and dryer, were you able to get to the laundromat this week?" They'll tell you "I wasn't able to get there." I'll tell them to put a couple of uniforms in their (child's) backpack and drop the backpack off in the morning. The kid leaves the backpack with me, and by the end of the day, I make sure everything is clean. (Williams has a washer and dryer in her office.)

Some apartment complexes don't have a washer/dryer hookup, so if they don't have a laundromat facility on the apartment property then it's up to them to get to a laundromat. Many of them don't have transportation to get to a laundromat, so that's a barrier. It's also a barrier if they don't have the money to spend at the laundromat. I try to help any way I can.

This type of support also builds positive relationships with the families. When I have to call to explain their child is doing a disruptive thing, they know I'm not lying to them. They can trust it.

What is your goal for the upcoming year?

My goal is to do more and engage more. The last year, I set the groundwork. Our parents know if they have an issue or question, the first thing they say is, "Can I speak to my advocate?" That is huge. I have my core, small group of parents. Now I want to get more involved.

How do you feel about your role at Phalen?

It's a blessing that this school invests in the family by having two of us (PIEs). It shows that our families are an important piece. It makes me feel amazing. It's why I wake up in the morning and do what I do.



It's why I pray on the way to school and pray on the way home. It's because some of the things they're going through are heavy. It makes me proud to know they have someone they can trust.

What we're saying is valued. We're at the table, and we're able to do more for our kids. In some schools, PIEs are brushed off and sometimes told to simply do what's required for Title funding. Here, we're in every principal meeting and every teacher meeting. We're included, and our voices are heard and respected. A lot of times, we're able to sway the vote and turn a situation into a positive for our families. If we were never brought to the table, then things can get missed and our families would ultimately be the ones who are not helped.