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## **"Think Together: The Next Generation of After School" helps students at Redlands schools**

By Miranda C.R. White, Staff Writer

REDLANDS - "Think Together: The Next Generation of After-School" is helping students at seven schools in the Redlands Unified School District.

The program is the largest organization for academically focused after-school programs in California, and it is free.

It is free because it focuses on helping at-risk students and is funded by state grants, federal grants and private donations.

Cindy Walker, site coordinator for Think Together at Kingsbury Elementary School in Redlands, said the program partners with school districts.

"At Kingsbury we have families in need here for a variety of reasons," Walker said. "We strive to offer whatever the kids need. We have really strong families."

She said the organization started a few years ago in California because a Los Angeles neighborhood was in need of a place where kids could be safe. So the mothers started up a place.

"It started off in one small center and it grew," Walker said.

"Proposition 49 allocated money for after-school programs."

She said the program focuses on three areas.

"We do academics and enrichment in language, math and science," Walker said. "We use different academic programs as well as enrichment like things like art, music and character building."

Another part of the program is keeping kids healthy.

"We follow the Harvest of the Month Curriculum," Walker said. "We try to bring healthy living, and we have physical activity every day. It's called catch activities."

The program doesn't offer one-on-one tutoring, Walker said.

"We have four program leaders, and they've got four different age groups to give them support," she said. "They give them support as a group, like peer groupings."

Walker came in a year ago and has served about 100 children.

"Eighty-five percent of the kids are re-enrolled from last year," she said. "They seem to really enjoy and love it. I'm always being greeted with smiles around the school."

She said the program brings in a few things of its own, but they still follow the organization's curriculum.

"I'm close to full enrollment and it's only the first week of school, Walker said. "Parents seem to be happy with the services being offered."

Think Together leader Alan Gonzalez of Clement Middle School said his goal is to prepare the students for high school as well as he can, particularly because he knows the social aspects of their lives will grow.

"I think it's really good," Gonzalez said. "I think it's going to benefit kids through inclusion and education-wise as well. It's going to help the kids that aren't getting extra attention."

In the Clement program, middle schoolers get their snacks, do homework and have some fun.

Ericka Heard, program leader for the sixth- and seventh-graders, passed out yellow lanyards with identification tags and snacks.

"I like the fact that the kids get a safe place to learn and play," Heard said. "I've seen homework become fun. I've seen kids wanting to do positive things rather than negative things."

The Clement program includes one-on-one time, but the kids do it on their own for 10 minutes, and then they can ask questions.

The schools participating in the program this year are Clement, Cope and Moore middle schools and Franklin, Kingsbury, Lugonia and Victoria elementary schools.

Parents who would like to sign up their kids can call their school's administration office.

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