

News

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****Graduate and medical students make science fun for school children

Sixteen graduate and medical students at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas want to get Dallas school children excited about science. They have adopted Maple Lawn Elementary and Thomas Rusk Middle School through the Dallas Independent School District's adopt-a-school program.

Each UT Southwestern student in the program carves at least an hour a week from his or her hectic schedule to work with youngsters at one of the schools. The Graduate Student Organization (GSO) also gave each school \$300 raised from recycling cans and papers to purchase science fair supplies and science books for the library.

"It is very rewarding to see the kids start to get interested in what we're doing," said Malu Tansey, graduate student in physiology and president of the GSO. Tansey works with Maple Lawn fourth-graders. "They ask so many questions, often basic things like: 'Why is the sun hot?' or 'How do we taste our food?'"

Graduate and medical students try to stimulate the children's interest in science while introducing basic concepts such as thinking logically, using the scientific method of reasoning and developing research projects. They also help generate project ideas for the schools' annual science fairs.

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Tansey will never forget one little girl who insisted on finishing her science project the same day she started it. When the graduate student asked the child why she couldn't finish it during Tansey's next visit to class, the little girl explained that she lived in a Salvation Army shelter and might not be in that school the following week.

"These kids really get to you. Often they have no type of support system at home," Tansey said. "It's nice to know that maybe we are providing these kids with an incentive to stay in school longer."

Ofer Reizes and David Robbins, co-chairmen of UT Southwestern's adopt-a-school project, work with eighth-graders. The older students present a special challenge, they said. "It's harder to get the kids' interest by the time they are in middle school. It's not as cool to pay attention," Robbins explained.

"It's not that the students are not intelligent," Reizes added. "It's just that no one has taken the time to sit down with them and make science interesting. We show them that science is fun."

John Perkins, Ph.D., dean of Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, said, "The students who participate in the adopt-a-school project have set a fine example that extends a challenge to us all to interject ourselves in the educational pathway at an early, determinant stage. Helping to instill in young people an enthusiasm for science is clearly an appropriate role for us as students and faculty at UT Southwestern."

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In addition to Robbins, Reizes and Tansey, the medical and graduate students involved in the program include Carolyn Allansmith, Penny Becker, Simon Bruce, Janet Cyr Finnegan, David Johnson, Teri Kleine, Kathy Loomes, David Raizen, Joie Rowles, Sara Scott, Lizabeth Urech, Martha Wilcoxson and Andy Yee.

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Note: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.