

August 20, 2024

Overview of Glenshire Elementary Special Friends Program

Special Friends is a program that enhances the educational experience and personal development of children who may be having social-emotional or academic difficulties adjusting to school. Glenshire Elementary School makes students' social/emotional well being a priority. There are a variety of reasons for adjustment issues such as a new baby in the home, a divorce, an illness, academic difficulties, a move to a new school, shyness, COVID trauma, and more. The Special Friends aide works one on one with identified students who are referred by their classroom teacher, parents, school counselor and sometimes by the students themselves. One criteria the teacher uses is the notion that if he or she had ten more minutes a day to give to a child, who would it be.

The mission is to help children build a solid foundation in school through development of social skills. The program enhances self-esteem and confidence through expression of feelings, ideas and nondirective play in a private playroom setting necessary for confidentiality. The main focus would be connecting with the students and helping them feel supported and cared about. The California Department of Education Guidebook for Reopening Schools highlights the importance of relationships and social-emotional learning and connection, as does the CDC, Child Mind Institute, CASC (Counseling Association of School Counselors), and many more organizations that look at students and the social emotional development of students. This has been compounded post world pandemic and a crisis situation.

Special Friends was formed in 1978 in Rochester, New York, under the umbrella of the Early Mental Health Institute. Its mission was to target "at risk" students in kindergarten through fifth grade to help them adjust to school at an early age. It is a short term program for children who need a little extra attention to help them through a difficult time. This Primary Intervention Program (PIP) has been at elementary schools throughout the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District for over twenty-eight years. Glenshire Elementary uses parcel tax funds from Measure AA, in conjunction with the Martis Camp Community Foundation Grant, to sustain this valuable program.

The Purpose of the Requested Funds

Currently we have funding to run the Special Friends program two days per week. Last year, the Special Friends program, in conjunction with the school site counselor, saw

40-50% of the entire student population. Early intervention programs like Special Friends address the growing needs of our students at Glenshire and it is important that we maintain an adequate level of service. We are going into the 24/25 school year with 505 students. Additionally, more and more of the new students entering Glenshire appear to have specific attributes and needs that can be met by the Special Friends' Program. These grant funds, if awarded, would allow us to provide more direct service to students in need four days a week. The Special Friends Aide works from the first day of school through the last, seeing three rotations of students throughout the year. The first rotation (10 weeks) are students that are referred by administration to get them motivated to be in school and the other two rotations (10 weeks) are referrals by teachers, parents and students. They fill out a pre-evaluation for each student when they refer and a post evaluation at the completion of the child's rotation.

The Anticipated Benefits that the Target Population will Gain

At the four day a week level, the Special Friends program meets the social-emotional needs of approximately 67 students per year. We know that students who are well adjusted and feel secure in their school environment perform better in school. For many students, the extra attention provided by the Special Friends staff allows their self-esteem and confidence to soar to new heights. It becomes the highlight of their day and allows them to fully benefit from the rich educational experiences provided at Glenshire Elementary.

Supplemental Funding

Measure AA, a parcel tax in Tahoe Truckee provides the part time funding for the Special Friends Program and full time School Counselor at Glenshire Elementary. I am requesting \$15,000 in order to be able to fund the aide four days a week for the 24/25 school year.