

"I love it when my students share with me something that is going on in their life that they need some advice in sorting out,"

and learners," noted Ottogian.

Making the second language first

BY JENNIFER TRATTLER

There are tremendous barriers to learning, but perhaps it's most difficult to teach a year's worth of curriculum while introducing students to a new second language at the same time.

Teri Wilcox emigrated to the U.S. from Cuba as a little girl and dealt with the hurdles of being an English Language Learner firsthand.

"It made sense to become a bilingual ESL teacher to facilitate the love of learning," she explained.

Wilcox followed in the footsteps of her mother, who taught in a one-room schoolhouse in the countryside of Cuba, and now Teri is in her 27th year of teaching and her fifth at Bryant Elementary School in Teaneck. Wilcox takes on the daily challenge as the only ESL teacher to 25 Pre-K and kindergarten students.

Wilcox's teaching methods reach beyond the classroom, extending to an afterschool club she developed three years ago.

The ESL Afterschool Club provides an opportunity for students to be



THANKS TO
Teri Wilcox
ESL Teacher
Bryant Elementary
School, Teaneck

engaged in planned activities that build their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills while having fun," Wilcox noted.

The club provides multiple resources including listening and recording stories on iPads, playing phonics games, and using tactile letters and kinesthetic movements to practice syllabication and spelling.

Wilcox also teamed up with the school's outreach coordinator and initiated another program this year called "Families Learning Improving and Promoting Success" (FLIPS) that provides workshops at PTO meetings to promote academic success along with emotional growth for students and their parents.

In some aspects, the program acts as an intervention since specific families are invited to attend based on student data, referrals and ESL services. The program has garnered extremely positive feedback from parents that promise to make the extra effort to attend the meetings.

"Involving parents in their child's education is a key component of the proverbial saying, 'It takes a village to raise a child,'" Wilcox continued. "My ESL community gets to know me and quickly learns that it is essential for them to be involved in their children's education."

Throughout her career, Wilcox has taught students from countries including Bangladesh, Guinea Bissau, Pakistan, China, Korea, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Guatemala, Dominican Republic and her native Cuba.

"I have enjoyed boundless opportunities to permeate the lives of immigrant children and families which have traveled from around the globe and have chosen Teaneck as their new homeland," Wilcox said.