



Fall Semester 2022



Three students walking on campus visiting exhibit booths during White Cane Day.

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Students Learning on Campus

Issue #1

Always on Trend

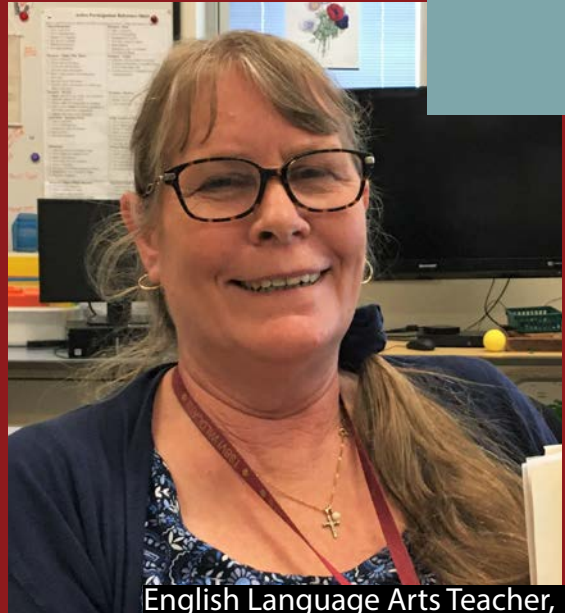
by Alex Arguello
Head of Community Engagement

The speed of innovation and change in the field of education often adds stress for new teachers. Often they feel the need to incorporate the latest software “apps” into their classrooms so that their students might learn more quickly and obtain content mastery. But to a 36-year classroom veteran like English Language Arts teacher Brenda O’Sail, she knows educational trends come and go, and she has been around long enough to keep her cool and focus on the needs of each student.

Brenda’s approach to teaching is informed by the hundreds of students that have taken her class. Her method is not about quantity but about having a deep understanding of the concepts before moving on to new material.

Students in her class learn poetry. They study the literary techniques employed by the masters. She encourages her students to analyze the poetry and organize the techniques into a small meaningful structure that they can understand. Her room is set up with all the information she is trying to teach hanging from the walls. Students are encouraged to reference the material as needed to help them remember the material.

Brenda believes in explicit teaching: breaking down the skills into small



English Language Arts Teacher,
Brenda O’Sail

elements, walking her students step by step through the skills, and constantly checking that her students have full understanding of each step. It takes incredible patience, but no shortcut can take the place of what works.

The transition from elementary to middle school is a big change for a lot of students. Teaching at TSBVI often means that you are receiving a new student in class from a variety of school districts across the state. Depending on each district’s proficiency in teaching students with visual impairments, a student can have knowledge gaps that need to be identified and remedied before moving on to more complicated material.

Always on Trend- Continued

One teaching strategy Brenda often employs is referenced by the phrases: “I do”, “We do”, “You do”. The strategy starts with the teacher demonstrating the skill or “I do”. Then the teacher proceeds to practice the strategy with the student or “We do”. Finally, the student practices the skill by themselves or “You do”. This strategy has stood the test of time, and students enjoy knowing that they will get plenty of practice before they are expected to do it by themselves. Brenda makes sure her students understand that, “learning is a journey and mistakes are part of that journey.”

Software applications have earned a place in classroom instruction. But if you are like Brenda O’Sail, and also have the ability to employ time tested teaching strategies, you will always be “on trend,” and schools like TSBVI will always want you on the team for as long as you want to teach.

“Learning is a journey
and mistakes are part
of that journey”

**Brenda O’ Sail, English
Language Arts teacher**



Brenda O’Sail, working with
students on a service project

A Journey to Connect

by Alex Arguello
Head of Community Engagement



Barbara Knighton, parent
and Family Lynx Leader

She waited patiently for her son at the bus stop in the large department store parking lot in Houston. This was Joshua's first full week of school at TSBVI, and a new routine was just beginning for the Knighton family. Barbara saw the charter bus from a distance, and as it moved through various gates, her heart started to sing in anticipation of hugging her baby boy. Then to Barbara's surprise, the bus passed her in the Sear's parking lot and continued another 200 yards to the Target parking lot next door. It may have only been 200 yards and 2 minutes of weaving around various parking lot medians, but to a mother missing her son, it was enough for the tears to start and all the anxiety and fear to bubble up to the surface. When she reached Joshua, she hugged him tightly and realized she and Joshua were both starting a journey.

When Joshua was in grade school, Barbara stretched to accommodate both her career as a realtor and involvement in his school. She volunteered at PTA carnivals and other school functions and enjoyed contributing time whenever she could. As her son finished middle school, it became clear that Joshua needed a more intensive curriculum tailored to meet his specific needs. She felt that TSBVI was the only place in Texas where this expertise existed.



Picture of Family Lynx members Amy Potts
and Barbara Knighton with Superintendent
Coleman and Edgenie Bellah

“take small steps and they will lead to bigger steps; having an impact on your child’s education is worth the effort.”

Barbara Knighton, Family Lynx Leader

The next stage of the journey presented new questions for Barbara. She pondered, “How will I contribute to my son’s education when he is two and a half hours away?” “How can I stay connected to his progress both in the classroom and in the evening hours while he is in the dorm?” The answers would come in the form of an invitation by Outreach staff members Edgenie Bellah, Eva Lavigne, and TSBVI alumni, Stacie Hardy Gallegosto. These mentors hosted the Family Leadership Series which was the first small step to learning about the educational process for students at TSBVI.



More training followed and soon Barbara was invited to be on the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) which focuses on keeping students healthy and safe. On this council she learned about TSBVI traditions, such as Jump Rope for Heart, Jingle Bell Run, and the Turkey Trot. Barbara’s participation in this committee directly impacted the quality of the food her son was eating, and the types of exercise routines available to him. She realized she could still have a positive impact on his experience and education.

Barbara’s training and participation in numerous committees gave her the confidence to team up with other engaged parents, such as Amy Featherston Potts and Patty Bushland, to form Family Lynx, an organization that encourages community among TSBVI families, alumni, and staff. In a relatively short time, Family Lynx was formed and launched many initiatives such as:



Picture of Barbara Knighton with Principal Fain

aPAWs for Staff – Through a partnership with the EXIT program, each week a different department is honored with a gift bag with individual aPAWs certificates for each staff member and treats. EXIT student, Christian Roberts, did a stellar job delivering more than 500 certificates to aPAWd TSBVI staff members throughout the school year.

PAWticularly Thankful Banner – In appreciation for TSBVI staff, they created and hung a large “thank you” banner, featuring a turkey hand showing the ASL sign for “love.”

Decorate the Dorms and Charm the Classrooms – Family Lynx parents donated holiday decorations to offer a festive feel during the holidays. Weekends Home helped collect the donations and get them to campus to add holiday cheer across TSBVI.

Wildcat Welcome Wagon – Family Lynx parents were a featured part of Campus Tours for prospective families. Via Zoom or in person, current parents welcome the new families with understanding of their situation and encouragement by sharing their students’ backgrounds and TSBVI successes.

Prom Red Carpet Promenade Zoom-cast & Parent Paparazzi – Because prom is a milestone for parents too, Family Lynx hosted new additions to the TSBVI prom festivities for families. Families coming to Austin for the weekend gathered at the hotel to mix, mingle, and to watch the promenade of

students as they arrived in their prom best—and took lots of pictures as their student walked the red carpet. Some parents even had the honor of walking the red carpet with their child. The red carpet arrival to the hotel ballroom was live-streamed via Zoom for viewing by families. Family Lynx fathers, Dave Bushland (Mary Rose’s dad) and Mark Potts (Rees’ dad), emceed the Zoom-cast. Family Lynx sponsored a professional photographer for quintessential prom pictures that were available for parents to download at no charge.



Students enjoying the red carpet treatment at the prom.



Sites & Sounds Video – Family Lynx released Sites & Sounds of The Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, a new video produced as a campus tour with the TSBVI Media Team. This view of the campus highlights the unique way the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is a part of a TSBVI students' day—every step of the way. "Sounds" that students use for orientation and mobility are featured at the various "Sites" throughout campus. English and Spanish versions are available at www.tsbvi.edu/families.

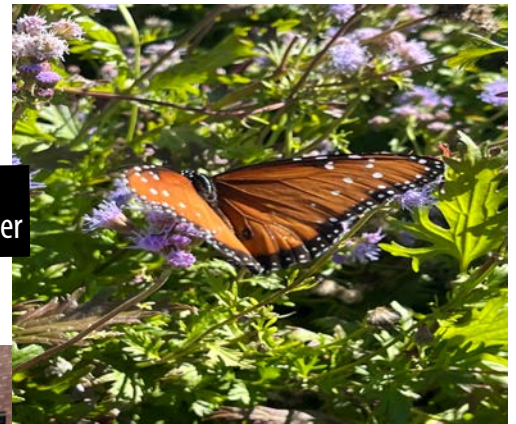
Resource Roundup – Family Lynx debuted a new monthly email which will go to all TSBVI families with abridged information about upcoming meetings, trainings, conferences, resources, camps, recreational activities and various opportunities available to you and your family. Current and past issues are also available to Family Lynx members via the website.

606 Butterfly Garden – Family Lynx designed the 606 Butterfly Garden that provides a nice place for students and staff to take a break. Family Lynx worked with the grounds crew and other staff volunteers to refurbish the beds in the 606 patio area. Native nectar plants to attract butterflies are now in place, and even survived the dry summer having been watered by a very super superintendent. A fountain donated by Mary Rose Bushland's family adds a tranquil touch.

When asked what she would recommend to a new parent starting to get involved, Barbara responded, "take



Butterfly drinking nectar from a flower



Butterfly garden with fountain and tables

small steps and they will lead to bigger steps; having an impact on your child's education is worth the effort." Parents interested in joining Family Lynx can visit www.familylynx.org

Photo Booth



Teacher and student race to the finishline at the Turkey Trot



Student getting bells at the Jingle Bell Run



Students on a field trip to a restaurant by the lake.



Students wrapping a railing with yarn aka "yarn bombing"



Superintendent Emily Coleman presenting Faith N. an award for outstanding achievement on the STAAR test.

Alex Argüello, Editor and Head of Community Engagement:

Suzanne Becker, Archivist Photo Contributions

Wildcat Times is a production of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The purpose of this publication is to inform parents about the many exciting activities on campus and to spur conversations between parents and students.

[Outreach Email Alerts Signup](#)

www.TSBVI.edu