

## Teacher visits relieve first-day worries

Annie Martin • *The Enquirer* • August 23, 2010

Cassi Rivera peeked out the window in her family's front door, expecting a visitor. When she saw Heather Husiak walking up the driveway toward her home, the 4-year-old opened the door and stepped outside on the porch to hug Husiak.

Husiak's visit was part of the Lakeview School District's home visit program, which sends kindergarten teachers and instructional aides to their soon-to-be students' homes to meet their future students and their families and deliver a small bag of gifts.

Those visits are intended to relieve first-day jitters for both students and parents, said Community Services Coordinator Suzanne Nielsen. The new students are meeting their teachers for the first time in their own homes and with their parents present, so it helps them feel secure, she said.

Research shows that allowing students to meet their teachers before the first day of school is one of the best ways to help them transition to school, Nielsen said.

"The majority of the questions we get are from those first-timers," Nielsen said. "They're not sure how everything works. This is one more piece of making everyone feel safe and comfortable and welcome."

Cassi and her parents invited Husiak into their home, where she gave Cassi a small purple bag containing a book, crayons and scissors. The bag also included a book for her parents about starting school.

The program was funded through a \$30,000 grant from the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, Nielsen said. The district was eligible to receive the grant because it was chosen for a Project ReImagine grant last fall along with 12 other districts throughout the state. The ReImagine grants were part of Michigan's push for federal Race to the Top funding.

If the visits are worthwhile, Lakeview will work with other districts that want to adopt the program,

Nielsen said.

Kindergarten students can be nervous on their first day, said Husiak, who teaches at Westlake Elementary School. A few students cry, while others are very reserved. It's helpful for her to be able to bond with them before school starts.

"They can have a lot anxiety," Husiak said. "It's nice because they get to meet us."

Cassi is looking forward to doing art projects, reading and learning numbers, she said. She visited her new school during a kindergarten round-up program.

"I feel like I'm having fun at school," she said. "I feel kind of happy."

The first day of school is also a big deal for parents, Vicki Rivera said.

"Your child is growing up," she said. "They're more independent."

Cassi has two older brothers, so she has looked forward to starting school. Still, meeting Husiak should make her feel more comfortable, Tom and Vicki Rivera said.

"It won't be such a shock the first day," Tom Rivera said.

Annie Martin can be reached at 966-0468 or

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Cassi Rivera waits on the front porch of her home as her kindergarten teacher, Heather Husiak, makes a visit. (Kevin Hare/The Enquirer)



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