

Literacy program helps boost scores up to 180%



Kirsten Clark, @kirstenlmclark 7:02 a.m. EST November 30, 2015

After an 8-week literacy program, students performed an average of 35 percent better on standardized-style tests.



(Photo: Sam Upshaw Jr.; The C-J)

While their classmates may have spent summer vacation at the pool or playing video games, members of four Boys and Girls Clubs in Louisville and Southern Indiana spent eight weeks receiving intense literary intervention.

But "it's a full day of instruction in a very fun way," said Stacy Johnson, director of academic services for Boys and Girls Clubs of Kentuckiana. "They don't even realize that they're being immersed into standards-based teaching most of the time."

The Common Core-based instruction, which more than 330 first- through sixth-grade kids received at least three days a week over the summer, yielded some pretty impressive results: scores on standardized-style tests went up - in some places, as much as 180 percent.



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<http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/education/2015/10/22/wonderopolis-aims-engage-kids-reading/74236752/>

During the eight-week period, kids in the Ed Endres, Jeffersonville, Newburg and Parkland clubs improved scores from pre- to post-tests an average of 35.5 percent, according to a statement released earlier this month. More than 80 percent of participants showed some sort of improvement during the course of the program, and incoming fourth-grade students at the Newburg Club experienced the greatest gains among the Kentuckiana clubs, showing an average of 180 percent improvement from pre-test to post-test.

Many of the kids were reading below grade level prior to the program, Johnson said. Although the program was originally put in place to prevent "summer slide," club officials saw that kids were exiting the program more prepared for the next grade than they were when school had just let out, said Boys and Girls Clubs of Kentuckiana President and CEO Jennifer Helgeson.

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Volunteer Derika Mercer gave instructions to Quiniece Watts, 10, center, during the Power Hour homework session at the Newburg Boys & Girls Club. Maliyah Herthel, 9, looked on at left. (Photo: Sam Upshaw Jr.; The C-J)

Although Boys and Girls Clubs of Kentuckiana had looked to improve literacy in the past, last summer marked a concerted effort to focus on standards-based reading intervention, led by certified teachers instead of volunteers.

Being able to hire actual teachers, said Johnson, "was really pushing performance levels up."

Johnson declined to disclose the cost of the program but said gifts from donors covered the cost of hiring nine certified teachers and several education case managers. All had experience in Jefferson County Public Schools.

The learning would begin shortly after the club's doors opened at 8 a.m. on summer weekdays. Kids would eat breakfast and then be divided into groups based on grade level. They would take weekly field trips that tied into a theme around which classroom-style lessons at the club would be based. The Science Center would come in to lead experiments with the kids.

The club also aimed to improve kids' test-taking prowess by teaching "power words" - words commonly found in standardized test questions, like "evaluate" or "support," that often trip students up.



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The national Boys and Girls Clubs of America pushes education, which includes intensive intervention, as one of its guiding values, but clubs in other parts of the country are limited in what programs they can offer, Johnson said. During a recent conference of Boys and Girls Club leaders, she discovered that while other clubs aspire to offer that level of reading intervention, Louisville's clubs are in an good position to offer it, she said.

"There's an advantage here with Jefferson County being the sole public school system," Johnson said.

Now that school is back in session, Boys and Girls Clubs of Kentuckiana is still an extension of the classroom, offering homework help after school. And when progress reports come out, club officials check them to see how the kids are progressing and call teachers to see how they can help the student receive individualized instruction even outside the classroom.

Helgeson said the summer literacy efforts are only one part of the organization's greater focus on education.

"I think that the programs are continuing to set the standard that all kids move forward at or above grade level, and that high school graduation is expected," she said. "... I think that moving forward this has the ability to change the trajectory for the future of some of our kids."

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