

# Summer school program gets good reviews from all involved

By LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

If enthusiasm were measured in water, Farmington Public Schools might have to invest in sandbags after the first year of its summer learning program.

Teachers and parents are pushing over the success of the district's Summer Extending Learning Program, which debuted in June. Some 142 students entering grades 2-4 attended the intensive 20-day program at Gill Elementary.

Reading and writing improved in all grade levels, school officials reported. Students selected for the summer program were having difficulty in language arts.

By intervening early, school officials believe short-term instruction can reduce the need for future remediation.

"It's a wonderful program," said Gayle Zimmerer, principal at Alameda Early Childhood Center.

Parents thought so, too. Karen Dickey's son, Michael, 7, was struggling in reading and writing. He's accelerated up three reading levels while his letter formations and spelling have also improved.

"As far as reading, he's improved dramatically," Karen Dickey said. "He'd bring home a

book every night and read."

Parents had to agree to work with their child on reading and writing at home. They were required to attend all parent meetings and agreed their child would attend all 20 days.

At meetings with parents, teachers suggested ways they could encourage their kids to read more at home. Ideas included having them plan trips using travel brochures or order meals reading from menus.

"I think (parents) showed an attitude change," said Peg Kules, a teacher at Wood Creek and a SELP staff consultant. "They see how they can be involved with a child."

Students were taught 2 1/2 hours in the morning. During the afternoon, teachers took part in staff development training.

Topics included teaching to multiple intelligences, recognizing gender bias, and finding ways to get kids to read.

What they learned in the afternoon, teachers could apply it in the classroom the next morning, Kules said.

Fourth-graders were a primary focus. Half the enrollment was made up of those entering grade four.

In that group, information

reading scores jumped from an average of 68.8 percent correct at the start to 78.9 percent. Writing and spelling also improved.

All students were tested at the beginning and end of the program.

A better gauge will come when they take the Michigan Educational Assessment Program test this year. Fourth-graders are tested in reading, language arts and math.

Second- and third-graders each made up one-fourth of enrollment. Gains were also seen in reading and writing.

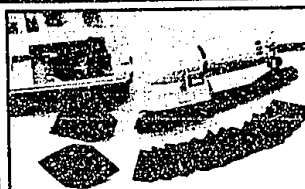
Second-graders were brought to post-first-grade reading levels, gaining three levels. Third-graders' reading also jumped three levels while spelling improved from an average of 57.8 percent correct to 89.6 percent.

What numbers couldn't reveal, though, were changes in how kids view education, said one teacher.

"By reading their comments, they were more positive," said Lisa Kelly, a first-grade teacher at Wood Creek Elementary. "One child said, 'You don't have to read just for (school) work; you can read for fun.'"

"That's a pretty powerful statement for a fourth-grader."

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