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REPORT CARD

TO THE TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS COMMUNITY

Schools boost students' reading skills

"Take three letters and make WAS." "Make another word using the same three letters." SAW. "Make a word that sounds like wave." SAVE. Clustered around a table, six students excitedly rearranged squares with printed letters on a rack to make new words from the letters w, a, v, e and s.

Lyon Elementary School teacher Norma Ramirez was using an exercise from the *Early Success* program to help primary-grade students who need extra help to read well. The students were learning to use the sounds of letters to put together new words—phonics—as well as learning to recognize certain words by sight that they will encounter over and over again when reading. Lyon was one of the original 10 Tacoma elementary schools—there are now 17—to use the *Early Success* program.

And, Lyon teachers have helped students dramatically improve their reading scores on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) tests. The increase was so significant that Lyon, along with Browns Point and Whittier elementary schools, has surpassed its fourth-grade reading accountability goal for the year 2001, recently set by the Tacoma school board. In 1998 the state legislature passed a law requiring all school boards to establish district-wide and school-level reading goals that students must meet on the spring 2001 WASL test.

Improving reading scores

Lyon Principal Pili Wolfe said her staff's focus on reading instruction and commitment to raising scores made a difference in Lyon's scores. Another

factor in Lyon's success is the staff's willingness to hold critical focus groups to examine their teaching methods and student achievement. Staff members hold grade-level meetings to discuss what is happening for their students. Lyon teachers also take advantage of district staff training in instructional practices, as do their counterparts district-wide.

Like many Tacoma schools, Lyon gets help from volunteers from the Foster Grandparent Program, area high schools, the community, local businesses, seniors and the school's families to provide one-on-one tutor assistance to students who are struggling—before, during or after school.

These volunteer tutors also work with students using the Accelerated Reader program. Through the program, students read books geared to their reading ability and answer questions on the computer. Students can move to a higher level at their own speed, once they do well at their current level.

Learning to read can be compared to learning to play ring toss. If you stand too far back from the post when you begin to play, you may not toss the rings over the post often—maybe you'll get discouraged and stop. If you start playing closer to the post, you can succeed in getting the rings over the post more frequently. That can encourage you to keep playing and move farther from the post as your skills increase.

If a student tries to read a story or book beyond his or her ability, that student will have trouble reading and may not want to read. If students read material

they can handle, they will become confident of their abilities and enjoy reading.

Classroom teachers at Lyon collaborate closely with support staff in programs like Title 1/LAP, English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and special education. There is also a high level of support for ESL students and parents.

Wolfe said that Lyon students have a silent reading time at school and take books home every day—and there are plenty of books available at each reading level.

In addition, Lyon has been using running records for nearly seven years to assess student reading skills. A student reads a selected passage aloud, while the teacher notes the errors made, assessing the student's strengths and the reading techniques the student used. Students also must verbally recount what they read to assess their reading comprehension.

The district uses running records with first graders for the Tacoma Screening Instrument reading assessment. And, teachers statewide use running records to assess all second graders' reading skills.

Encourage readers

District schools, like Lyon, are doing many things to improve student achievement in reading, and you can help. Conference with your son or daughter's teacher to find out your student's reading strengths and ways to overcome any weaknesses. Read aloud together at home and provide reading materials and a place to read. Encourage your student to achieve more each day.

TEACHING THE BASICS

Reciprocal teaching helps readers improve

Reciprocal teaching is another method teachers at McCarver, Stanley and Roosevelt elementary schools and Jason Lee Middle School are using to help students learn to read better in "Soar to Success," an upper-grade intervention program. Successful readers use this method while they read to draw meaning from the text. The goal is for students to apply this method when they read by themselves. You can practice the techniques with your family.

Using reciprocal teaching

A small group of students with a teacher or leader reads a story together in short sections. Then they discuss the meaning of the text at the end of each section. The group members can take turns leading the discussion, using four techniques or tools good readers use: predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing. The group can use these in any order and doesn't need to use all four all the time.

After looking at the cover picture and title, students **predict** what might

happen based on clues found in the picture and title. They write down the predictions and check them after the group reads the entire story.

To **clarify**, students re-read or discuss words or points in the story that were not clear. When students come to words they don't know, they find the largest, familiar parts of the word they do know, such as prefixes, syllables or suffixes. For example, to figure out the word *practice*, they divide it into *pract* and *ice*. *Act* is part of *pract*. It begins with *pr*. The students know *ice*. They try to sound out the word. If it doesn't sound right, they will try it in a sentence until it sounds right and makes sense. *Pract-ice* doesn't make sense in this sentence: Go to baseball practice. But *pract-iss* does.

After reading a selection, the students and leader ask **questions** about the content or main ideas for other group members to answer. They may then **summarize** or tell about important things in the story in their own words—the characters, setting or special events.

When students first learn these techniques, the classroom teacher leads the group, provides feedback and monitors the give-and-take among the group. As they become more adept at using the techniques, students will take turns leading the group sessions. Reciprocal teaching is an interactive, cooperative process that helps students understand what they are reading and can keep them interested in a story's outcome.

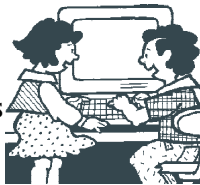
Try the techniques

The Tacoma News Tribune newspaper began a 15-part series titled "The Field of Dogs" on January 6 for young readers and their parents to promote reading among families. You and your family may want to read these newspaper stories together using the reciprocal teaching techniques. Or, you and your students may want to go to your local library to select books or magazines that you can read together.



Volunteers provide one-on-one reading help for students

His gray head leaning close to the sixth grader's, Mortimer Cranson coached a student reading aloud in a room full of Stewart Middle School students. Some focused on using an Accelerated Reader computer program. Students needing the most help teamed up with other volunteers to practice reading one-on-one.



Cranson has been in the Foster Grandparent Program for three years helping struggling readers. The program requires seniors to volunteer five days a week, four hours a day in return for certain benefits. Bryant, Jefferson and Whitman elementary schools and the Tone School also have volunteers from this program. Cranson's wife, Elsie, sat at a desk in

front of him, working with another sixth grader—she volunteers her time at Stewart as do several other seniors, although they are not part of the Foster Grandparent Program.

Volunteers help out in a variety of ways at Tacoma schools and are highly valued by staff and students. They come from a wide range of backgrounds: parents, seniors, business professionals, community members and students. They all have one thing in common: they love to work with students. And, the students benefit from the one-on-one attention.

In his mid-eighties, Norman Hokenstad, a volunteer at Geiger Elementary School and former realtor and IBM field engineer, said, "Working with students has been my most

rewarding career so far." Seniors also have the time to devote to students during the day—and on a consistent basis. Many other volunteers have careers and families which limit their time in schools. Some area businesses allow their employees to take time during the week to volunteer in schools.

All volunteers must register with the Family Involvement Center's (FIC) Volunteer Services which has close to 7,000 active volunteers listed. Bonnie Pinckney, FIC director, said, "Volunteering gives a first-hand, close-up view of what we are doing for our students in school today. And, volunteers can be positive role models for students." If you or your friends are interested in working with students one-on-one, call the FIC at 571-1087.

WINNERS!

★ **Superintendent Jim Shoemake** was selected as Washington's Superintendent of the Year by the Washington Association of School Administrators.

★ **La Roy King, Stewart Middle School, and seven Stadium High School teachers (Dennis Dale, Kathleen Densley, Jay Eastley, Robert Hardwick, Jonathan Ketler, Nancy Norton and Angela Thomas)** were included in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*.

★ As part of Make A Difference Day, **students at Stanley Elementary School** made decorations for the wards at Mary Bridge Children's Hospital, for nursing home residents and for the Tacoma Rescue Mission.

★ **Wainwright students Kena Little, Anna Mullen, Kaylie Rainer, Rena Ahdut, Kelly Myers and Jade Sotelo** had stories they wrote for the Tacoma News Tribune "Write to Fright" scary story contest published in the newspaper.

★ **Stadium High School students and staff** have received recognition for their achievements:

Printmaking and ceramics students had their work on display at the Tacoma Art Museum in conjunction with the Picasso exhibit. **Laura E. Hartness, 11th grade**, was honored at the Tacoma Children's Museum for a print she designed.

The Stadium High School choir Ars Nova and other choir students sang as back-up for Reba McIntyre at a Tacoma Dome concert.

Seniors Margaret Groves and Jane Robinson, received the 1998 National Council of Teachers of English Award (NCTE) for outstanding writing.

Navy Junior ROTC instructors Commander Alan Mandigo and Chief John Harkness received citations from the Military Order of the Purple Heart for directing the many community service projects completed by the Stadium High School Navy Junior ROTC unit.

★ **Gault Middle School students Shayna Martinez and Sharday Cruell** met Governor Gary Locke and wielded shovels in a groundbreaking ceremony for a local telecommunications center.

★ **Sharon Arnett-Kocha, head cook at Stewart Middle School**, entered the Nestle Ice Cream Sweepstakes and won the grand prize of \$10,000 to be used to purchase school library books. **Olita Bracking, a Stewart student**, won first place in the 13-18-year-old category in a gymnastics essay contest. Her essay was printed in an issue of USA Gymnastics.

★ **Foss High School staff and faculty nominated senior Mario Penalver** for a Latino Student Recognition Award. **Foss' Knowledge Bowl team** placed second out of 31 teams in a recent competition.

★ **Christie Kaaland, Browns Point Elementary School library media**

specialist, wrote "Holiday Pick: Readers Theatre," which was published in the November 1998 issue of *School Library Media Activities Monthly*.

★ **Lincoln High School teacher Eleni Hamilton** was one of 148 teachers nationwide recognized by the Securities Industry Foundation for Economic Education for helping students gain a better understanding of the U.S. economic system and financial markets through the use of The Stock Market Game.™

★ **The Wilson High School Rams football team** competed for the state 4A championship title this school year.

★ **Mt. Tahoma High School teachers, Dale Fountain, social studies, and Connie Iverson, English**, will be facilitators for other teachers in the Building Success program, sponsored by the Western Region College Board Advanced Placement Program.

EVENTS!

January

School board recognition month

- 4 School resumes
- 5-29 Optional enrollment
- 6-20 8th grade literacy and math test
- 18 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no school)
- 21 All-city PTA meeting
- 27 End of first semester
- 28 Secondary staff day (no school for middle or high school students)



February

African-American history month

- 1 National School Counseling Week begins
- 2 Groundhog Day
- 14 St. Valentine's Day
- 10 Middle-school conferences
- 15 Presidents' Day
- 15-19 Mid-winter break (no school)
- 22 School resumes



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A BETTER PLACE TO LEARN

Administrators learn about scoring student work

"This is the first time this has ever been done in the district," said Jim Shoemake, superintendent. He was referring to the fact that all administrators, regardless of position or location in the district, are encouraged to attend two workshops on scoring student work in writing and math for promotion policy points.

"The promotion policy is such an important initiative that administrators need to be able to explain how we score students' work. At the same time, they become more knowledgeable about what we are requiring students to achieve," said Shoemake. "People who are not directly associated with classroom instruction, such as transportation or finance staff, should fully understand the magnitude of this promotion policy effort. We are all in this together."

Bill Rossman, assistant superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, said, "The promotion policy is a critical part of the district's three-year plan to help students achieve at a higher level. Student scores on work samples indicate how well students are doing and whether they are in jeopardy of not being promoted. Teachers across the district are being trained in and using the same scoring methods to provide as fair an assessment of student work as possible."

Teacher tools

The scored student work will go with each student as he or she moves on to the next grade. And, students will have the opportunity to increase their scores as they turn in more work. To help teachers

organize the scored student samples, the district developed a folder with a matrix of the promotion policy requirements by grade level. Teachers also have score sheets for the math and writing samples to attach to student work. These give students feedback about how well they did on the different components of their work and where they stand. The scores give teachers and parents an indication of how well their students are doing and whether they are in jeopardy of not being promoted.

Additional support

The district has given additional money to elementary and middle schools to support students who have Individual Acceleration Plans (IAPs) and are in jeopardy of not meeting promotion policy standards. The funding amount

per school was based on a formula of how well students did on the fourth and seventh grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) tests.

Schools use this funding to support struggling students in a variety of ways, which include:

- hiring hourly employees as tutors to work with students before, during and after school;
- providing a two-week "jump start" program in August for incoming elementary- and middle-school students to give them a rehearsal on the components of the promotion policy in addition to the regular LAP/Title 1 summer school; and
- hiring substitutes to provide release time for teachers to conference with students or score student work.



Students take district, state tests

Eighth graders took the district's literacy and math test (LMT) for promotion policy points for the first time this January. Like the fifth graders last school year, the eighth graders will have a second chance to take the LMT this spring and increase their scores. Fifth graders will take only one LMT this spring, because the promotion policy has been fully phased in for them.

In March, eighth graders and third graders will take the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), which is new this school year and replaces the California Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS). Students in grades

4, 7 and 10 will take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) tests in April and May. Eleventh graders will take the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) at the same time.

You can help your students do their best on any test by making sure they: know when the test will be; get a good night's sleep before the test; don't get stressed out; have a good breakfast the day of the test. Be sure to encourage them to do their best. Remember, test scores are just one indication of how students are doing. Classroom work and other assessments are important, too.



PO Box 1357
Tacoma, WA 98401-1357

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