

## **Steward School District's Innovative Reading Program Leads to 100% Success**

Many concerns in the education world have arisen over the last year. Time and time again we keep hearing the phrase “students are falling behind”. The good news is that the students at Steward Elementary School are not “falling behind” in reading during the pandemic. Our students are evaluated at least twice each quarter to determine their reading levels. All of this comes as no surprise to the teaching staff and administration.

In fact, since August of 2015, when Superintendent Lowell Taylor gave the green light to teachers to try an unconventional and innovative framework for reading instruction, the student reading levels and achievement have been steadily climbing. In traditional reading instruction, all students in a grade level read out of the same textbook, regardless of students' individual reading abilities. Students are grouped based on grade level and have little chance to read material they find interesting and engaging.

In August of 2016, students in grades 2-6 were assessed to determine their actual reading levels. Just 10 of the 32 students (31%) were reading at or above their expected level. The students were then put in small groups depending on their skill level at that time rather than their grade levels. Instruction was given to these small groups using books that were at an appropriate reading level for the members of the group. Students' reading levels were assessed every

few weeks, and the small groups were rearranged accordingly. After one semester of this type of reading instruction, 17 of the 32 students (53%) were reading at or above their expected level. The efforts of teachers and students, intelligently applied created a 71% increase in students reading at grade level!

After the 2016-2017 school year, the small group framework was expanded to include first grade and some seventh and eighth grade students. Students were also given more choice about what books they would read as long as the books were within their instructional levels. As students progressed through the reading program their reading levels continued to improve. At the end of the 2017-2018 year, 51 of 59 students (89%) were reading at or above their targeted level. By the end of the 2018-2019 school year the number was 46 of 49 (94%).

As of January 2021, **100%** of our students in second through eighth grade are reading at or above the expected levels that were established before the pandemic. In other words, despite the hardships beginning last spring, our students continue to thrive and we are confident that any students that may fall behind will get caught up quickly in this program.

An administrator, like Superintendent Taylor, focused on empowering innovative teaching helps students reach their full potential. A teaching staff supported by that kind of administration and willing to go the extra mile to construct their own curriculum for the

benefits of their students, will continue to showcase the growth of students even during challenging times.

As a staff we want parents and families to know how extra-ordinary it is for a school to be able to say, with evidence-based proof, that 100% of students read at or above grade level and we are proud of the tremendous student progress.

For more information on student progress, innovative programming, or student learning, contact Steward School District Superintendent Lowell Taylor.