

‘Read Right’ offering results

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by Kate Martin

LA CONNER — Alissa McCoy never liked to read. Her eyes moved across the words on the page, but by the end of the paragraph she had already forgotten the content.

Then at the beginning of the year, a teacher suggested she attend a literacy program called Read Right. The program is new in the La Conner School District, but students and parents already are reporting strong returns.

For McCoy, the results are dramatic.

“Since I started I’ve read, like, five books, and I usually don’t ever read books,” McCoy, 16, said. “We have to have a reading requirement for English class, so it’s helped me with that too.”

In the Read Right program, students work with instructional assistants to understand the process of reading.

Assistant Linda Willup said learning to read in the Read Right program is much like a parent reading to a young child.

Students hunch over their books in a classroom at La Conner Elementary School. They follow along as someone else reads a passage of text — either live or on tape — several times. After they listen to the passage, they read it silently. Finally, students knock on the table when they are ready to try reading aloud to the group.

The technique requires focus and determination. Only when the child can read the passage perfectly — a term Willup called “excellence” — can he or she move to the next passage.

“We’re looking for conversational-like tones,” Willup said. “We want it to flow and be comfortable for them to say and comfortable for listeners to hear.”

If the students cannot read the passage back word-perfect, they must start again.

Swinomish Education Director Tracy Edwards said students learn to evaluate their reading ability and are motivated to try again if they don’t read a passage well.

“Self-evaluation is so key,” Edwards said. “For them to know what excellence looks like is so wonderful for them because they can take that idea and transfer it to another area.”



Instructional assistant Theresa James points to a diagram on the chalkboard that illustrates the process of critical thinking.

Students from all three of the district's schools are in the program. So far it includes just a couple dozen students, but when more Read Right instructors are trained, high school Principal Marsha Hanson said the district can serve more students.

The Read Right program was used for about a decade at Manson School District, where Hanson was principal from 1989 to 2007.

As long as students applied themselves, they showed improvement, Hanson said.

"If the student went in fighting it or was a behavior problem ... then of course it didn't work," she said. "There were always kids we could put in that did want to solve their reading problem."

Taysha James, 13, always managed to hide her issues with reading, said her mother, Theresa James, who is an instructional assistant with the program. She said her outgoing, energetic daughter had always received high marks in class. But then a teacher suggested her daughter enter the program.

"I listened to her taped read. I was shocked at how bad a reader she was," Theresa James said. "She slipped through the cracks, definitely."

Taysha James hung out with smart friends and listened in class, Theresa James said, and that was enough to get her through most classes.

"I used to hate reading because I just couldn't understand things, and it made me feel dumb and low," Taysha said. "I'd stutter and my face would get red. I wouldn't feel confident about reading and so it would make me mess up even more."

But for Taysha, who read at a third-grade level before the program, Read Right has allowed her to read confidently out loud to her class when called upon.

Teachers recommend students for the program, or students and parents can ask to be placed on the wait list. A key component is students must want to improve for it to work, Hanson said.

Hanson also believes the students in the program will pass their knowledge down as they get older and have children of their own.

"It will make a difference in the reading problem," she said.

The district received a \$92,950 grant from College Spark to pay for the program's materials and training. The school district and the Swinomish Tribe are also paying for portions of the program, which also helps Swinomish students in the district's Lop-Che-Alh Early College High School Program.

Lena Cladoosby, a senior, said she wants to teach early childhood education. But while her reading was at her grade level, she wanted to boost her reading comprehension for college.

She said the class has helped her understand what she is reading.

"Read Right helped me slow down to help my brain keep up to what my mouth was saying," Cladoosby said as she laughed.

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