



# Lakeview Middle's Academy of Reading shows success

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staff writer

When he started school last year, he was reading at a third-grade level. He was in the eighth grade at Lakeview Middle.

After spending five months in the school's new Academy of Reading, tests showed that the student's reading ability had increased six grades.

The average gain among the 225 students enrolled in the program was nearly two grades. Several students went from reading several grades below grade level to reading a grade or two above.

The school has expanded the program this year and the school district is studying the Academy of Reading to see if it should be used in other schools.

"It's the best reading program I've seen," said Gary Jackson, a curriculum specialist at the school.

When school started last year, 84 percent of Lakeview's seventh-graders were reading below grade level.

It wasn't much better in the other grades. Three out of four sixth-graders and six out of 10 eighth-graders were also reading below grade level.

Tracy Hall, the school's principal, had

seen the Academy of Reading work at Anderson's Westside High and thought it would work at Lakeside. Schools in North Carolina and in Charleston had already shown phenomenal success with high-poverty student populations like Lakeview's, Jackson said.

After using the program, most of the students were reading at grade level.

Academy of Reading is a computer-based program developed by a company in Ottawa, Canada.

Unlike many reading programs designed for middle school students that focus on reading comprehension, the Academy of Reading focuses on the fundamentals, Jackson said.

"If students have to sit and think about every letter of every word, they're not going to be able to concentrate on understanding what they've read," said Donna Wharton, one of two Academy of Reading teachers at Lakeview.

It begins with letters and sounds, then progresses as the student masters certain skills. The computer then tests on letters and letter combinations, syllables and words with different phonetic patterns.

Finally, the student progresses to connected sentences and paragraphs.

Then comes comprehension.

"It really focuses on what the students didn't learn in elementary school," Jackson said.

The goal is to be able to read with automaticity and fluency, he said.

The program also allows teachers instant feedback that shows how well the student is doing and whether his progress is slowing down, he said.

Jackson said the school's results would have been better, but some of the students in the Academy of Reading were already reading at or just slightly below grade level. Those students were put in the program because they were struggling to make basic on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test, he said. After the program, some of the students improved to proficient or advanced on the test, Jackson said.

This year, the special needs students will be in the academy all year, he said. The school's English as a Second Language students will be enrolled all year as well. They will be given instructions in Spanish, while the reading program will be in English.

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