

Thanks to an ARA Studies and Research Grant titled “Outside the Lines,” males at Camden Fairview Intermediate School are excited about reading. The purpose of the grant was to target males who are not interested in reading, are seriously at risk, and/or are attending In School Suspension. The results are noteworthy.

Grant funds have been used to purchase magazines and other high-interest materials that appeal to males. Sports-related materials have been number one with the students with Sports Illustrated for Kids flying off the shelf as soon as it arrives. Fourth and fifth graders in the program alternate months for a copy, and each student is allowed to keep his copy. However, the students are eager to read every edition, so they are trading magazines with the students in the other grade when they finish a magazine. Parents of two of the students have ordered the magazine for their sons because they wanted every issue of the magazine.

Males who have not participated in class discussions are now eager to share information about their favorite sports and sports figures. The students meet during their lunch period once a week with me, and we are joined frequently by a male mentor. I have been surprised by the details they remember about the sports figures: where they went to college, members of their family, their statistics, and specific game details such as how many tackles. During each session, each student takes a “fun fact from each state about football” and reports to the group. They especially enjoy being a sports reporter and using their “microphone” to inform the group of the latest news (SLE OV.1.5.3!). They understand the information in the magazine and are teaching other students how to read material such as a gamer grid (SLE IR.12.5.2; R.9.5.13; IR.12.5.5!). Through lively discussions about illegal activities such as dog fighting and illegal use of steroids, they are developing their own sense of right and wrong as they evaluate players’ actions. They are now taking sides as to the Super Bowl winner, basing their choices on their reading (Bloom’s!). Although they disagree frequently, they are respectful of the opinions of others, an important social skill.

Reading Sports Illustrated for Kids led them to read biographies on sports figures, which helped them select a player or sport to produce their own books. Hearing about the program, some males who do not have reading problems asked to join the lunch group. Consequently, the “new” students have teamed with other group members to produce books. These guys like to draw, so art supplies were purchased for them to illustrate their books.

Our at-risk students are developing friendships with stronger students through their reading interests; the positive results are seen in their classrooms throughout the day.

Students are writing more because the grant provided funds for a journal. Their entries include interesting facts, questions for the group based on their readings, and reports on players/issues of their choice to share with the group (SLE W.5.5.1; W.4.5.14; R.9.5.19; R.9.5.11; R.10.5.5; IR.12.5.6 & OV.3.5.1; OV.1.5.8; OV.3.5.3).

Recently, the students took an assessment on a non-fiction passage, and a student who scored a 1 on his open response on the same kind of passage last year, scored a 3 on his open response this year. Other students are showing improvement, some greater than others.

The ability to read affects so many aspects of a person’s life, and the results of this program prove the importance of reading. I thought the program would be a success, but I never imagined the impact it would have on these students. Wanting to read, discuss, and write is a major change for most of these students. All of these areas will help them succeed in school and life.

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