

### Structure + scripted lessons = flexible implementation

(Continued from page 3)

#### After school

- Year-round schools in one Nevada county are using Reading Together for English Language Learners. These schools chose tutor/tutee pairs from the same tracks to have students on the same schedules. Students receive intervention four times a week, with two days of tutor training and two days of tutorials. Because they have two coordinators, one trains the tutors while the other is available for extra one-on-one time with tutees. This additional instruction in language arts and literacy skills greatly benefited third-grade tutees.
- A Maryland district made its own adaptations: some schools train tutors, then hold a tutoring session immediately afterwards; other schools train tutors one day and hold tutoring sessions the next day; schools do either one or two complete lessons each week.

If you have questions about or need assistance scheduling our programs, you can call our Customer Relationship Coordinator toll free: 1.866.921.0000 or email at [info@learningtogether.com](mailto:info@learningtogether.com). If you are a current Learning Together coordinator, contact your Educational Consultant at the direct number you received during training, or call our toll-free corporate number for assistance.

We'd love to hear from you. If you have comments or implementation suggestions, please send them so we can share them with coordinators who may benefit from your experience.

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Raising student achievement by the power of 2.

Fall 2004

### Mission accomplished in Iowa City

"One of my personal goals last year was to expand academic mentoring," said Dr. Lane Plugge, superintendent of Iowa City Schools. "We've had other programs where senior adults came in to read and visit with the children, but we found they wanted to do more. Academic mentoring offers students all the emotional benefits of mentoring, but it makes a real impact on school performance."

Iowa City had 52 tutors at three school sites, and is expanding the program to about 80 tutors for fall 2004. Most tutees used Reading Together Grade Two, and some may continue this fall with Reading Together Grade Three. Dr. Plugge feels so strongly about academic mentoring that he has offered to buy Reading Together materials for existing Big Brother/Big Sister mentors within the school system.

Last year's tutors came from many sources. Dr. Plugge recruited some at services clubs where he had speaking engagements. Others were recruited through RSVP, the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, which is part of the Senior Corps network of national service programs offering older Americans opportunities to apply their life experience to meet community needs.

Tutors included retired university professors, members of the Board of Education and the editor of the local newspaper. "We tapped into the business community and came up with some pretty high-powered retired people," Dr. Plugge said. "We also used high-school students. Some of them got credit with service organizations, but most of them just wanted to tutor."

Iowa City honored its tutors by allowing them to select children's books, which were then dedicated in their honor to the schools' libraries.

The district conducts testing in the fall, but Dr. Plugge is confident the Reading Together students will show great strides. "And," he said, "we have a lot more students who can benefit."



### The stars shine bright in Texas

Reading Together helped Dallas Independent School District-Area Two post the top scores on the state reading test! More than 86 percent of their third graders passed (86.3 percent), compared with an average of 81.1 percent for the seven other comprehensive Dallas districts.

Area Two implemented Reading Together Grade Two and Grade Three in 21 schools. The schools chose several implementation models, including during and after school. Each campus used cross-age tutors, but selected the format and age level that worked best.

Area Superintendent Shirley Ison-Newsome says, "Learning Together has provided support for our more struggling readers. This mentor program will be one of the primary sources we will use with the 13.7 percent of third graders who will take a second administration of the test.... We look forward to seeing our results with third graders next year who are now engaged with Learning Together as second graders. Stay tuned."

### Free activity sheets offer vocabulary enrichment

Supplemental activities have been added to Grade Two Phase I lessons, offering students practice in prepositions, pronouns, synonyms, vocabulary and other language skills. These worksheets can be added when there is time after a lesson, or may replace the take-home letters for children who would benefit by more explicit language and phonics instruction.

The activity sheets were developed by a team of Reading Together coordinators in Montgomery County Public Schools (MD), which has one of the longest-running Reading Together programs. They have been especially successful with ELL students in Montgomery County, using Reading Together as a transition for students entering mainstream classrooms.

Log onto <http://learningtogether.com/support/updates.html> to see a sample activity sheet. A complete Phase I set is available electronically by contacting [info@learningtogether.com](mailto:info@learningtogether.com).

Be sure to check the Learning Together website periodically for other program updates, including a free Grade Three bonus lesson and Spanish translations of tutor/tutee permission letters.

### PowerPoint presentation simplifies parent orientation

Show parents of tutees and student tutors how Reading Together or Math Together work with a series of PowerPoint slides outlining the program basics and benefits to participants. The presentation also is valuable for helping classroom teachers understand and buy into the programs. Contact [info@learningtogether.com](mailto:info@learningtogether.com) for a free CD.

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## Word of Mouth

*"The major benefit that we attribute to the program is the boost in attitude and confidence for our fourth-grade tutors. They have demonstrated an eagerness to attend the sessions and to help their second-grade tutees by being role models."*

**John M. Barbour, Principal**  
Barnardsville (NC) Elementary School

### Double the power of Reading Together

It's natural for coordinators to gravitate to the brightest students as they select cross-age tutors for Reading Together. But this year, think about picking below-proficient readers instead — scientific research and experienced coordinators tell us these students benefit as much or more than the tutees Reading Together targets.

Princeville Montessori in Tarboro, NC, found significant improvements in behavior, academics and attendance for all participants in Reading Together Grade Two. "The tutors benefited as much as the tutees," Principal Mary B. Odom said. "Tutors improved grades, demonstrated a better attitude toward reading and felt good about being positive role models for younger students. The program was a success for all!"

Cross-age tutors are taught reading strategies through direct instruction, lesson demonstrations by the coordinator and guided practice. Tutoring allows less proficient students to:

- Hear books read by a competent reader (the coordinator). Read alouds are an effective comprehension strategy (Ouellette, Dagostino and Carifo, 1999).
- Find authentic reasons to practice, thus improving their own reading performance (Haluska and Gillen, 1995).
- Read picture books without stigma. Picture books are helpful for older but less fluent readers (Carr, Buchanan and Wentz, 2001; Robb, 1998).
- Make the choice to read for pleasure. Reading independently is a reliable predictor of reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson and Fielding, 1988).
- Improve communication skills (Cobb, 1998)

Finding an authentic reason to practice is especially important for older students, who may be embarrassed to read books that are appropriate for their skill level, but seem too childish for their peers. After helping with Reading Together Middle School, 23 of 24 eighth-grade tutors at East Lee Middle School (Sanford, NC) passed their end-of-grade tests.

"Tutors, even though struggling readers themselves, are motivated," Principal Richie Weaver said. "Teachers tell me the material is most helpful to prepare students to encounter content reading in the EOG test."

### Improving communication with teachers pays off

One site coordinator was baffled at the lack of cooperation from the classroom teachers of her second-grade tutees. It was nearly the end of the term before she discovered that

the teachers were upset that they had not been included in a press conference announcing the new implementation.

Another coordinator was having trouble with fifth-grade teachers, who were reluctant to let students out of the classroom to participate as tutors. He created a simple email newsletter to share the benefits of cross-age tutoring, invited them to preview the materials and observe tutorials, and shared results at the end of the year. Now in his third year of Reading Together, this coordinator has no trouble recruiting tutors — the fifth-grade teachers do it for him!

Most teachers are overworked (and underpaid) and are understandably reluctant to take on new responsibilities. The key to cooperation is communication, communication, communication. Let classroom teachers know why Reading Together is worth their time. Ask their assistance in selecting tutors and tutees. Include them in planning and parent orientation. Develop a regular means of reviewing student progress, in person or by email. Share progress forms, writing and activity sheets. Ask their advice when there are bumps in the road, and celebrate together when students reach their goals.

Learning Together is helping to improve communication by adding resources for coordinators. Contact [info@learningtogether.com](mailto:info@learningtogether.com) for any of these updates available for fall 2004:

- PowerPoint overview
- Newsletter template
- Overview articles (Word documents) that can be personalized to keep teachers, administrators and parents informed.

### Senior citizens become GRAND Pals

Reading Together is the highlight of the week for many senior adult tutors who volunteered for the Guilford County, NC, GRAND Pals program. "My son says I should get a paying job, but I tell him I get paid every time I see my tutee," said one tutor, a 75-year-old great-grandfather.

GRAND Pals was a cooperative effort of Guilford County Public Schools, Greensboro and High Point Communities in Schools, and Greensboro and High Point United Ways, with financial support from Lorillard Tobacco. The Volunteer Center of Greensboro joins the collaboration for the 2004-2005 school year.

Most GRAND Pals tutors plan to return this fall, when their tutees will graduate to Reading Together Grade Three. Though they were unsure about the impact they might have, end-of-grade assessments showed impressive results. Tutees improved their reading scores by an average of five levels, with some students improving as many as 12 levels. Teacher surveys also showed that most tutees improved their behavior and academic achievement in the classroom as well.

New tutors will be recruited to work with another group of second graders this fall. They'll get a chance to see the program in action and hear tutors talk about their involvement by watching a new video produced by Guilford County Public Schools.

### Structure + scripted lessons = flexible implementation

Sometimes coordinators arrive at Learning Together training without a clue about the program. It's one more thing their principal has assigned them to do, and sometimes they're not too happy about it. We're proud to say that by the end of training, we've won over the most unwilling participants and have set them on a course to plan a successful Reading Together or Math Together implementation. That's step one.

Step two is finding the time and place that works best on each campus. Your Learning Together Educational Consultant will help you review campus logistics to help determine the best implementation model.



"One of the greatest benefits is that anyone can implement the program and be successful because it is so scripted," said Dr. Yvonne Walker, Coordinator, Title I Programs for Clark County, NV.

Districts throughout the country have used a remarkable range of choices as they put Learning Together to work in their schools. Your Educational Consultant can review the benefits of each:

### Before school

- One Texas site makes use of the time before school begins. Tutor preparation begins over breakfast; tutorials extend into the first class period.

### During school

- As an extension of its Title I program, a North Carolina school implemented Reading Together to target qualifying students. Tutor preparation and tutoring sessions are conducted first thing in the morning, so students start their day ready to learn.
- One Texas district teamed up with corporate volunteers. They used extended lunch hours to tutor, coming at different times, depending on their lunch schedules. Another adaptation was that the volunteers had a job share arrangement. Initially, both people in the job share came for tutorials so that bonding with the tutee could occur. After the third lesson, the volunteers alternated conducting lessons.
- A West Virginia school found that the logistics of the program worked easily and flowed well with the regular school schedule. They implemented the cross-age model with fifth-grade tutors working with third graders. Tutorials were conducted during the fifth-grade resource time with the Title I teacher.

(Continued on back page)

*It's time to give back for all the gifts I've gotten. I love helping my tutee.*

Great-grandmother and GRAND Pal tutor

*My tutee couldn't believe I was there just to help him. He kept asking, 'Are you really coming back?'*

GRAND Pal tutor

*I hated being out of the classroom, so it's been a joy to watch (my tutee) grow from this experience.*

Grandmother, retired teacher and GRAND Pal tutor