

November 6, 2015 –Staunton City Schools Nationally Recognized for Literacy Program

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STAUNTON CITY SCHOOLS NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED FOR LITERACY PROGRAM

Staunton, VA - Staunton City Schools has been recognized as one of 35 school divisions from 19 different states to receive a Districts of Distinction award. Finalists are selected for this award triannually by *District Administration* magazine, based on creative initiatives to challenges and successful results. Staunton City Schools is being recognized for its elementary literacy initiative and is featured in *District Administration* magazine's November edition and on their website for "Responding to Rigor with Literacy Innovation".

In 2013, the assessment of English Language Arts standards shifted dramatically, requiring a higher reading level of students and much deeper understanding of text. Staunton City Schools recognized that subtle changes in the existing K-5 literacy program would not be adequate in responding to this rigorous shift. The literacy program was redesigned with direct involvement of reading consultants, Sharon Walpole and Mike McKenna, and established a 2.5 hour daily literacy block, including whole-group reading of grade level text, differentiated reading instruction, writing, and word study. The school division began addressing changes in the program in grades K-2 in 2011 with full implementation of the K-5 program in 2013-2014.

The new literacy program initiative impacted the early grades (K-2) very quickly. Beginning in spring 2012, the division had the highest benchmark average ever received in our school division on the PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening), and the lowest percentage of students identified for intervention services on each of the grade K-2 assessments. The division has maintained a lower percentage of students identified for intervention than the state average for each year since initiating the new program.

"The quality of a program is dependent on the quality of implementation, and our teachers are who have most impacted our results. They have worked collaboratively across schools to reflect and refine the quality of the curriculum and provide engaging and motivating literacy instruction for students," states Director of Assessment and School Improvement, Stephanie Haskins.

In 2014-2015, the division morphed an existing division-wide literacy committee to become a vertical team (grades K-5), with grade level representation from each of the three elementary schools. The team was renamed Literacy Innovation Committee. The term "innovation" implies using a new idea or method to make improvements, and that is exactly what committee members did. During these meetings, specific components of the literacy program - including shared reading, interactive read-alouds, and differentiated reading instruction - were modeled. Depth of student understanding was emphasized, and examples were given of how questioning and written responses could be taken to a deeper level. Planning checklists were used for each component to help support future planning for teachers in deepening student understanding. In between literacy meetings, teacher representatives communicated information from the meetings with other grade-level colleagues within their schools and conducted video self-reflections of a particular component (including a description of engagement strategies). During the literacy meetings, teachers across schools collaborated to share a portion of the video and discuss reflections.

By the conclusion of the committee meetings last year, the team developed a reading flyer describing the key components of the program, including creating readers, writers, and thinkers; developing a literature-rich community; forming strong reading-writing connections; and differentiating based on student needs. With the new K-5 literacy program, students read fiction and non-fiction books and consider the lifelong lessons of characters and build interest about the world around them, attributes that prepare students to be successful citizens in our community.

The spring 2015 Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment demonstrated a dramatic shift in performance of students in grades 3-5. All schools showed significant gains in pass rates, from a 6-18 percentage point increase per school, as compared to the previous year. The division average for the three schools is now 72%, as compared to 62% the previous year. One of our schools has an overall rate of 83% exceeding the state average for both passing and pass advanced in every grade 3-5. For the 2015-2016 school year, the Literacy Innovation Committee is focusing on analyzing student work to continue to advance this positive trend in literacy.

Dr. Linda G. Reviea, Superintendent, comments, "As the level of rigor and expectations for students has increased over the past few years, the teachers and leaders in Staunton City Schools have responded with collaboration and innovation. We are thrilled with the literacy gains we are seeing with our students and how this program has helped strengthen our Professional Learning Communities."



Megan McAllister, 5th grade teacher, actively listens to student, Jalyn Kier, during reading and discussion of text.



Teachers from all three elementary schools join together at Literacy Innovation Committee meetings and have discussion with other teachers across grades and schools. Front features Erin Barney, 5th grade teacher, and Shannon Love, 3rd grade teacher, discussing the "then versus now" of reading.

For more information about the Districts of Distinction award, visit the following links:

<http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/117c23a6#/117c23a6/42>

<http://www.districtadministration.com/dod>

For more information about the literacy program, including a flyer, video sample, and presentation, visit the following link: <http://www.staunton.k12.va.us/Page/4356>