

Press Room

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Waterford reading program excites students

by Kathy Washington

MACOMB — At the Waterford Early Reading Program classroom at Lincoln School, a class of children came in and waited for their teacher's instructions. When directed, the children eagerly sat at the computer that has his or her individual picture displayed on the computer screen.

One of the activities allowed the children to create their own stories and printed them as small books. Another activity allowed the children to trace a letter of the alphabet with their fingers on the computer screens and practice writing that particular letter on pads on their desks. Each child's screen displayed a different activity based on each child's pace and comprehension. After each activity successfully completed, certificates were displayed on the screen congratulating the children for successful completion of their activities. The reward was immediate with the children responding with excitement and smiles.

The Lincoln School kindergarten classes began a new computerized supplementary reading program called the Waterford Early Reading program at the beginning of the school year. The kindergarten teachers had an in-service this summer on the program and have been enthusiastic about using it with the students.

The Waterford Institute, a not-for-profit institute, invested 10 years and 25 million to develop this program based on the latest research on reading with the goal of producing a program that teaches children essential emergent, beginning, and fluent reading skills. The instructional technology of the program ensures that this research is delivered directly to the students as they use the program daily. It is a follow-up to the reading program that is used in the regular kindergarten classroom.

"The computers run at the child's level," said Nancy Caldwell, Program Assistant at Lincoln School. "They all start off at the beginning with the same screen. Then the next day, if the child did not accomplish what the computer thought they should have, they repeat it so that the child has another chance to do it. I can reprogram the computers if they are having trouble with the rhyming sequence so that it will do that rhyming sequence again so that they get a higher score on it."

This program was made available to Lincoln School through state reading grant money. Sally Sallee, Principal of MacArthur School and Title 1 Director, said that the \$553,525 grant was disbursed by the Illinois State Board of Education. She also said

that this program addresses President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind legislation with an emphasis on reading. It meets all of the legislative criteria.

The Waterford Early Reading Program teaches those skills identified in research as essential to learning to read. Children use the software 15-20 minutes daily for the entire year, progressing through a systematic sequence of research-based activities. Each level includes off-line Language Arts curriculum suggestions to build on the activities and literature that the children utilize on the computer. It features online student diagnostic and evaluation features. The Classroom Management system stores performance data for every student and presents that data in student reports and class summaries.

"The beauty of it is when a program with a child ends, the computer calls up the next child," said Buffie Kelly, Electronic Education Area Sales Director. "The teacher doesn't have to go back and forth. For us in Illinois, the beauty is that it matches our Illinois Standards. Therefore, we're sure that we are addressing early reading/language arts benchmarks for the children. As well as the fact that these children are daily diagnosed. It's a diagnostic assessment going right along with the program. As their working, what will happen is they will finish an activity always successful. Even though it may have taken them three tries. The next time they get to that activity, it wraps around so that they get it from a different way."

Level One (kindergarten level) enables young children to make the most of all learning opportunities by building their confidence, individualizing their instruction, and engaging and motivating them. It reduces the risk of failure because the program teaches children at an appropriate pace. The program individualizes instruction and removes the fear of competition and emphasizes print concepts, letter knowledge, and phonological awareness to ensure future reading success. It combines rich animation and music to enchant children and motivate them to learn. It also allows children to use videos and books at home to share with siblings and parents.

"We would invite parents and anybody else to come and see the children in action," said Sallee.