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Program Lifts Students' Math Scores: Officials: Statewide Gains Are Dramatic

By Joy Campbell, *Messenger Inquirer*, Owensboro, Ky. October 29, 2007

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Math intervention teachers at Sutton, Estes, and Cravens elementary schools have some numbers they're particularly proud to share.

Their kindergarten and first-grade students who got intervention help posted one to two years of growth in math skills in one year and outscored their peers on norm-referenced tests.

The Kentucky Center for Mathematics just released statistics from the first year of the Primary Mathematics Intervention Initiative for Grades K-3, and officials said the results statewide are dramatic, with students in the program significantly outperforming their peers.

"In all of our K-3 Grades, the kids who received intervention outscored the comparison groups," said Jennifer Olssen from Sutton. "Hopefully, we'll see even better results this year."

The three elementary schools in the Owensboro Public School

district were among 45 initial Kentucky schools to receive funding for two years to conduct math intervention.

Another 41 Kentucky teachers got the math grants starting this year, including Foust in the Owensboro district and East View and West Louisville elementary schools in Daviess County.

Forty more schools will be awarded the two-year grants starting in 2008-09.

The first-year results "are better than anyone could have expected," said Alice Gabbard, director of diagnostic intervention for the center.

The center, located at Northern Kentucky University, coordinated the teacher training and provides support.

The three local schools used **Number Worlds**, a textbook product of SRA, and an accompanying software program.

The program allows teachers to diagnose where students are

performing relative to math skills and help them to get where they need to be. Most students in the program are one to one and a half years behind in math.

Olssen worked with no more than six students per group for 30 minutes per day at Sutton. Each teacher worked with small groups.

"It's very hands-on; they don't just solve problems on a page," Olssen said.

Nicole Taylor at Estes echoed that in describing how visual she makes the program for her students.

"I want to bring my students on a mind field trip and have them visualize where, at their homes, they see numbers," Taylor said. "Even the kindergartners can see the value in that. They see the numbers on appliances and all over their homes."

Vicki Shelton at Cravens said the intervention program makes the numbers concrete instead of abstract.

"Seeing struggling students grow is so exciting," Shelton said. "It's

great to see a program that makes a difference.”

The teachers saw the greatest growth in kindergarten and first grade students.

Shelton’s targeted kindergarten students moved ahead by one and a half years compared to the comparison group’s half-year spurt. Her first-graders gained two years, while their peers advanced 1.7 years.

Her second- and third-graders also made more progress than their classmates who weren’t in the program.

Olssen said most of her kindergarten kids grew at least a full year, and some achieved closer to two years of growth. At second- and third-grade levels, students gained a half-year.

Taylor’s students made comparable progress with the *Number Worlds* students making greater jumps than the control groups.

Statewide kindergartners in the program scored higher than 64 percent of all students nationally, while their peers who didn’t get the specialized instruction scored higher than 36 percent of all students. The teachers and the

center are hoping to get funding for a third year.

“We’re trying to close these gaps for these children; most are one to one and a half years behind,” Taylor said. “My students just know this as ‘Math Club,’ and they don’t feel awkward; they are more eager to learn.”

Funds for the math grants come from the Kentucky Department of Education. Schools have until Dec. 17 to submit primary intervention grant applications for the 2008–09 school year. More information is available at www.kymath.org under “intervention.”

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