

Eunice Public Schools

Teaching 'gatekeeper' skills



KIMBERLY RYAN/NEWS-SUN

Eunice Elementary special education teacher Janette Carrillo, above, works closely with students Taylor Robinson and Heriberto Gonzales at a reading center.

VANGE PERRYMAN
NEWS-SUN

Many Eunice Public School elementary teachers are devoting 90 minutes a day to focus on literacy in the classroom.

The teachers are using funds from the Reading First Grant, which provides materials and PalmPilots to test students' reading levels.

"This (program) is based on 30 years of reading research," said EPS Superintendent Toni Trujillo. "We set aside time first thing in the morning when our students are fresh and have had breakfast."

Students spend 8:30 a.m.-10 a.m. working on different reading skills. Teachers use various centers to assist students in five areas of reading. Those areas include: comprehension, vocabulary, oral language, phonemic awareness, which consists of putting sounds together to form words, and phonics.

Some of the centers involve students partner reading, teachers reading out loud, reading games, writing sentences, spelling key words in a story and drawing pictures to go with the story.

"I like it when Mrs. Harvey reads to us," said 8-year-old Chelsea Parker. "When we partner read, we help each other when we get stuck on a word. We try to sound it out."

Every teacher has the same core reading curriculum that picks up where each grade level leaves off and so that each grade learns the same information. Teachers

supplement that reading material with additional individual resources throughout the day.

"We have always had good teaching here," said Mettie Jordan Elementary School principal Alice Hahn. "Now we are just all lined up in a unified, focused direction."

The teachers also work with students on their writing skills during the week as part of the reading block time.

"These are gatekeeper skills," Hahn said. "They can't survive without these skills. The further behind they get the more difficult it is for them to catch up."

Several students who do not read at their current grade level get individual attention reading help during the 90-minute reading block.

Students are tested at the beginning of the year by their teachers using PalmPilots. The test results are immediate so teachers can begin to help students improve in the areas where they are weak.

It is mandatory through the Reading First Grant that kindergarten-third graders are tested for their reading level skills. But the Eunice district takes that a step further by testing the fourth and fifth graders.

The tests for those students cost \$1 each and, according to Hahn, it is worth the buck to help students become better readers.

"You have to read everything, including a job application," Hahn said. "We want to give our children every advantage, but this is simply good teaching."

BUILDING READING SKILLS



KIMBERLY RYAN/NEWS-SUN

Second-grader teacher Malissa Sisk reads to her students just before they disband into smaller reading stations.

- ✓ **Comprehension**
- ✓ **Vocabulary**
- ✓ **Oral language**
- ✓ **Phonemic awareness**
- ✓ **Phonics**

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