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Tennessee Awarded State Improvement Grant

The efforts of SIG are specifically designed to provide wrap-around support to the Reading First Initiative. Improving parents' abilities to support and participate in their child's education and development of literacy skills is also a key focus of the SIG.



These interventions will focus on the development of language and communication skills, pre-literacy skills, school readiness, and literacy skills in school-aged children in order to improve reading scores, support effective progression or transition through the educational process, and to reduce the number of children who require special education services. The efforts of SIG are specifically designed to provide wrap-around support to the Reading First Initiative. Improving

parents' abilities to support and participate in their child's education and development of literacy skills is also a key focus of the SIG. The project is funded for a five-year period, having been initiated in eight schools during the 2004-2005 school year; additional schools will be added each year. The first schools involved in the program are elementary schools, but higher grades will be included in future years.

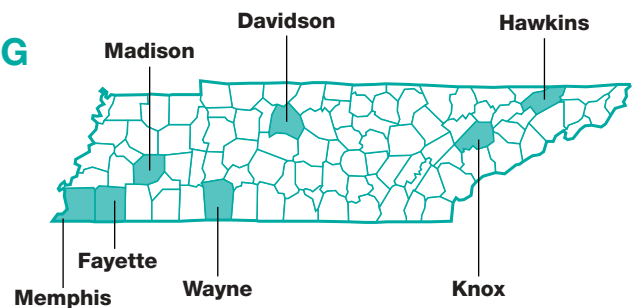
One of the central aims of SIG is to facilitate collaboration between partners who see the successful education of all children as vital. Through the combined efforts of higher education staff, educational leaders and experts, teachers, and parents, the needs of children can be

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Participating Schools for SIG Initial Year

Seven schools have been selected to participate in the initial year of Tennessee's State Improvement Grant. Each school is a

Reading First school, indicating the need for interventions that will assist students in the increased development of reading skills. Schools were chosen to include each of the three areas of Tennessee—east, middle and west—and consist of both rural and urban neighborhoods. In its initial year, SIG is concentrating on elementary schools, but higher grades will be included in subsequent years.



This year's schools include:

- **Beech Bluff Elementary School**, Beech Bluff, TN (Madison County)
- **Collinwood Elementary School**, Collinwood, TN (Wayne County)
- **Hollywood Elementary School**, Memphis, TN (Memphis City)
- **Inskip Elementary School**, Knoxville, TN (Knox County)
- **Keplar Elementary School**, Rogersville, TN (Hawkins County)
- **Kirkpatrick Elementary School**, Nashville, TN (Davidson County)
- **Somerville Elementary School**, Somerville, TN (Fayette County)

Check out the next issue of SIG^{nal} to find out what's been happening in the SIG schools!

The Tennessee Department of Education was recently awarded a five-year State Improvement Grant by the United States Department of Education. The State Improvement Grant program assists states in reforming and improving their educational, early intervention, teacher training, and transitional services for students with disabilities. Each state chooses its own program that meets the criteria for the grant. The Tennessee State Improvement Grant (SIG) has elected to support professional development and technical assistance for educators in the implementation of a continuum of scientifically research-based interventions to improve pre-literacy and literacy skills of children ages 2-22 with special needs.

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explored and programs implemented to benefit each child. Because schools are made up of children from diverse backgrounds and abilities, interventions and support will differ at each school, addressing the wide-ranging needs and concerns of teachers, administrators, and families at each location. For example, staff members of some schools have asked for assistance with professional development for teachers not served by the Reading First Initiative. Others have requested supplemental reading materials, assis-

tance with analysis of test data, and family engagement activities. After conferring with staff members from participating schools, the SIG staff has created individual service plans for each school.

In addition, the State Improvement Grant provides for a website that will gather data on best practices for literacy development, including information that will be helpful to people (school administrators, teachers, and families) who are working to increase the literacy abilities of children. The website will include infor-

mation on finding programs that have been proven to work, based on scientific research. The website will be up and running in April at <http://sig.cls.utk.edu>. Quarterly newsletters heralding SIG events, promising practices for teachers and families, and highlights of participating SIG schools are planned; additionally, a brochure has been created announcing the SIG program.

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For more information about the SIG grant or to find out how your school can be involved, please contact SIG Director Harolyn Hatley at 615-532-1659.

Questions Parents Can Ask...About Reading Improvement

As parents, we want the best for our children. We want them to succeed in school so they may have an easier life. Being a good reader is a huge part of success, but how do we help our children become better readers, and how do we know when they need help?

Open communication with a child's teacher is a big step toward helping them to be successful in school. The following information is from the Winter 2005 Parent Partners Empower newsletter of the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center in North Carolina and gives ideas for

questions you can ask your children's teachers about their reading progress. The questionnaire was created through a collaborative effort by parents, educational consultants, teachers, professors from the University of North Carolina, and ECAC staff.

If you have questions about your child's overall reading progress, ask....

1. What is my child's grade level in reading? What does that mean s/he can do?
2. Where does s/he need to improve?
3. Is there a difference between how well my child reads and how well she understands what she reads? If yes, what can we do to improve the weaker areas?
4. What can I do at home to help my son/daughter read well? (For example: can you suggest workshops, reading lists, parent/child materials that I may borrow, or website supports?)
5. How will I be notified about my child's reading gains? Will you update me every 2-3 weeks?



3. What strategies are being taught to help my child work through difficult sounds or words when reading?
4. What are some books, poems, nursery rhymes, word games, books, videos, audio materials, etc. that I can use at home to help my child with word recognition, sounds and/or reading aloud?
5. For practicing reading at home, would you help me select material(s) that my child can read comfortably (i.e., where 90% of the words are ones my child knows)?

If you have questions about reading comprehension, ask...

If you have questions about word recognition, sounds, and fluency in reading, ask....

1. Has my child ever been tested for language and sound awareness? If so, how recently and what did the testing show?
2. What is being done in the classroom to help my child avoid pausing unnecessarily at words?

1. When my child is having trouble understanding what s/he reads, what do you do to help her understand the material?
2. Would you show me what you are doing?
3. Can you tell me about some other activities that I may do at home to help her understanding what s/he reads?
4. What resources can you give me to use at home to help my child?
5. What kind of activities can we do before or after my child reads to help her understand the information?

Highlight on Early Intervention Efforts



The **Children First Development Center** in Johnson City, Tennessee, serves children ages one through twelve. The Center, in operation since August of 1997, is recognized as a leading quality day care in the area. In fact, the center volunteered to be one of the first to be rated under the new State of Tennessee's Star-Quality Child Care Program for Child Care Centers, was awarded a three star rating (the highest rating) on its first report card, and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Children First is currently piloting the DLM Early Childhood Express Preschool Curriculum, a comprehensive, research-based program that uses carefully selected and sequenced learning experiences to develop children's minds and bodies. Several factors make Children First an excellent location within which to pilot this program. The Center is located within and primarily serves children from the families living in the Keystone Housing Development. Because many of the SIG schools face issues related to poverty, this collaboration can help to identify and address poverty-related issues. In addition, the DLM curriculum is being used to provide early intervention for three- and four-year old children who are considered to be at risk for failure in school, providing information on a key targeted

Spotlight on SIG Partners

We at **Family Voices of Tennessee (FV-TN)** are pleased to be part of the SIG team with the State Department of Education and other partners. Our main role is to work with families at the participating schools. We help coordinate activities and events that assist families to support their children to develop, learn and succeed as students. The different ways we do this include:

- Assisting school parents, teachers and administrators to outreach and engage families' participation in school or learning activities to benefit their children
- Helping families identify and access services and resources to meet basic and special needs (as these relate to SIG literacy and learning objectives)
- Providing and helping to coordinate funding to support family participation in school and SIG-related activities
- Supporting families to gain knowledge and skills that extend their ability to help their children learn and be better students

Who are we?

Family Voices of Tennessee (FV-TN) is the state chapter of Family Voices, a national grassroots network of families and friends advocating on behalf of children and youth with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or other special health care needs. FV-TN operates as a family-directed program of the Tennessee Disability Coalition. Our primary focus has been access to health

care services that are family centered, community based, comprehensive, coordinated and culturally competent. FV-TN also works with providers, administrators, and families to create policies and programs that reflect our values. We also promote the inclusion of families as decision makers and support essential partnerships between families and professionals.

FV-TN Website:

www.tndisability.org/familyvoices

Toll Free Family Line:

1-888-643-7811

(Connects to the Nashville office only)

FV-TN staff involved with SIG:

(All staff are parents of children with special health care needs)

Dara Howe, FV-TN director and consultant on the SIG management team

Phone: 615-383-9442

Email: familyvoices@tndisability.org

Family Resource Specialists:

Charlene Harmon, West TN

Phone: 901-327-4612

Email: FVwest@tndisability.org

Julie Sullivan, Middle TN

Phone: 931-686-3353

Email: FVmiddle@tndisability.org

Donna Graham, East TN

Phone: 423-234-2334

Email: FVeast@tndisability.org

population for the SIG grant. Given that teachers using the curriculum are highly trained and educated in the field of early childhood education and literacy, any issues related to the curriculum can be isolated as curriculum issues rather than teacher-related problems.

The program at Children First focuses on children's educational growth, but also includes support services for families,

adult education, and health and social issues. Through collaboration of everyone involved in the center, Children First has become a model site where we can gauge the effectiveness of curriculum and programs and learn to address both educational and social issues through school administrators, staff, and families. For more information about Children First Development Center, call (423)232-4782.

Center for Literacy Studies
600 Henley St., Suite 312
Knoxville, TN 37996

Resources for Parents and Teachers

Following are resources that parents and teachers might find valuable in helping children become better readers. Because many parents do not have access to the Internet, it might be help-

ful if schools can make and distribute copies of some of the information found on these pages. Another option would be for schools to make a computer available for parent use, and to inform

parents about that availability. By finding ways for parents, teachers, and school administrators to work together, we are better able to focus on our shared goal: our children.

Resources for Parents

<http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/succeed/index.html>

Children spend about 1,000 hours per year in school. So, helping children enjoy learning and being successful in school is an important goal for parents, other family members, and schools. It takes two major institutions, the home and the school, working together to successfully educate the child. **Helping Children Succeed in School** is a program written by University of Illinois Extension educators that gives successful strategies for parents and caregivers to help their children succeed in school.

Topics include: Parental Involvement in School, Instilling a Love of Learning, School Stress, Learning Styles, Study Habits and Homework, Test Taking, Grades—To Bribe or Not to Bribe, Getting Extra Help, Parent-Teacher Communication, and Additional Resources

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/index.html>

This booklet printed by the U.S. Department of Education contains activities that you can do with children to help build the skills, attitudes and behaviors needed for school success. There is no one "right" way to do the activities. You should make changes and shorten or lengthen them to suit your child's attention span. You might want to use them as a starting point for some activities of your own. If you don't have resources listed for

an activity, remember that most public libraries offer free use of books, magazines, videos, computers and other services. Most resources needed for these activities are inexpensive.

Resources for Teachers

<http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/wested/pub/htdocs/over.htm>

SchoolsMovingUp, a WestEd initiative, helps schools and districts address the immense challenge of raising student achievement in low-performing schools. In an interactive Web format, SchoolsMovingUp offers practitioners knowledge and expertise they need to make sound decisions and take tangible action in their school reform efforts. It provides high-quality resources, proven services, and powerful tools that education professionals can use in their work with low-performing schools nationwide. Resources include profiles of schools from across the country that have improved student achievement, easily implemented or replicated school and district tips to assist in school improvement efforts, and articles, books, and abstracts offering practical ideas and models for school improvement. Frequent online events bring experts to the Web to share lessons learned, new ideas, and related resources. SchoolsMovingUp also offers practical information about the sweeping reform of the No Child Left Behind Act.



**Tennessee State
Improvement Grant**

Advancing the Skills of Tennessee Students

Harolyn Hatley, Project Manager

Email Harolyn.Hatley@state.tn.us

Telephone 615-532-1659

Department of Education

Division of Special Education

7th Floor, Andrew Johnson Tower

710 James Robertson Parkway

Nashville, TN 37243