

State Improvement Grant: A Year in Review

In late summer 2004, personnel from the Special Education Division of the Tennessee Department of Education gathered people from educational and community agencies across Tennessee. Their purpose was to find organizations and people to guide the State Improvement Grant awarded to Tennessee by the U.S. Department of Education. SIG's goal is to increase pre-literacy and literacy skills in Tennessee's children through professional development, technical assistance, and implementation of research-based interventions. SIG management extended contracts to Family Voices of Tennessee, University of Memphis, East Tennessee State University, the University of Kentucky, and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Workgroups were established around higher education, service provision, and family issues.

Once the educational and community partners were named, SIG staff began to identify schools that would be the pilot group with which SIG staff would work. Targeted schools were Reading First schools. Reading initiatives would wrap around Reading First grades K-3, extending to preschool, as well as 4th and 5th grades. Representatives from selected schools were invited to an October 2004 meeting to discuss questions they had about the State Improvement Grant. After this meeting, principals from seven schools across Tennessee agreed to become the initial SIG schools: Beech Bluff Elementary, Collinwood Elementary, Hollywood Elementary, Inskip Elementary, Keplar Elementary, Kirkpatrick Elementary, and Somerville Elementary.

Visits to schools in December and January resulted in tentative agreements between the schools and SIG about what schools needed from SIG and what could be provided through the grant. Many of

the schools' needs focused on requests for additional professional development and reading strategies for teachers of preschool, kindergarten, 4th and 5th grades, and additional reading materials.

Because SIG also focuses on parent involvement, some schools agreed to host Family Literacy nights. The first of these sessions was held in January at Knox

County's Inskip Elementary school, where parents discussed the importance of reading, learned about new reading strategies, and enjoyed pizza with their children. In March, a Family Fun Night was held at Keplar Elementary school in Rogersville, with parents discussing reading enjoyment strategies while children participat-

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Governor Announces Tennessee's 2005 Summer Reading Program

In a letter to parents, Governor Phil Bredesen announced this year's Summer Reading Program for children. The governor wrote, "The Summer Reading Program for children is designed to promote reading skills throughout the summer months when most children are not in school. Our public libraries provide the ideal setting for fun, as well as continuing education during the summer months."

This year's program theme is "Be Major League: READ," and the advertisements will include sports themes. Each library in the state schedules and plans its own programs that will fit the children and parents of the local area. Some programs are offered weekly and some may be offered more or less often, depending on local need and support. In some counties, evening sessions will be offered to accommodate the working schedules of parents. Call your local library for more information about Summer Reading Program schedules.

County	Name	City	Phone
Davidson	Library Service for Deaf & Hard of Hearing	Nashville	615-862-5750
Davidson	Nashville Public Library - Main	Nashville	615-862-5800
Fayette	Somerville-Fayette County Library	Somerville	901-465-5248
Hawkins	H. B. Stamps Memorial Library	Rogersville	423-272-8710
Knox	Fountain City Branch Library	Knoxville	865-689-2681
Knox	Lawson McGhee Library	Knoxville	865-215-8701
Madison	Jackson-Madison County Library	Jackson	731-425-8600
Madison	Shiloh Regional Library Center	Jackson	731-668-0710
Shelby	Hollywood Branch Library	Memphis	901-323-6201
Shelby	Memphis-Shelby County Library & Info Center	Memphis	901-415-2700
Wayne	Collinwood Depot Branch Library	Collinwood	931-724-2498

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ed in reading, crafts, and activities.

In February and March, 4th- and 5th-grade teachers from Inskip Elementary School participated in three professional development workshops at the University of Tennessee's Reading Center. A brochure outlining the State Improvement Grant was printed, an inaugural issue newsletter was planned and written, and development of a web site devoted to SIG activities and literacy research was begun.

March and April brought a new SIG staff member to the schools. University of Memphis staffer Suzy Page and ETSU staffer Katherine DeVault will be familiar faces at SIG schools and preschools. Suzy began her visits to SIG elementary schools in March and has visited each

school at least once. She is currently negotiating plans and schedules to return to schools to work directly with teachers to provide requested training in reading intervention strategies. Katherine has continued her visits to SIG kindergarten classrooms and to the preschools that feed into SIG schools, assisting teachers with early literacy and intervention strategies.

In April, the first issue of the SIG newsletter was printed and distributed, and the SIG web site was launched (<http://sig.cls.utk.edu>). Planning and implementation continued for present SIG schools, while negotiations began with additional schools for the next year of the grant. The decision was made by the SIG management team to pursue middle schools and high schools that are fed by SIG elementary schools, and initial

calls have been made to some of the principals in those schools. In addition, two elementary school were recruited to add to the seven presently participating schools.

During the next few months, SIG staff will be working with teachers to improve reading intervention strategies and with families to increase involvement in schools and to encourage summer reading with their children. Teachers from SIG schools will be attending conferences; one will be for 4th- and 5th-grade teachers and another for preschool and kindergarten teachers (see conference announcement).

Watch for the next issue of *SIGnal* or check out our web site (<http://sig.cls.utk.edu>) for upcoming events and further announcements about Tennessee's State Improvement Grant!

• UPCOMING CONFERENCES •

**SIG Summer
Institute
July 13 – 15, 2005
Nashville, TN**

Fourth- and fifth-grade teachers and other appropriate staff members from State Improvement Grant (SIG) schools are invited to attend the inaugural SIG Summer Institute. Participants will arrive at the

Doubletree Hotel in Nashville on Wednesday morning, July 13, and lunch will be served while introductions are made. The conference will take place Wednesday afternoon, all day Thursday, July 14, and Friday, July 15, until noon. The focus of the conference will be methods for assessing and working with children's reading strengths and weaknesses and strategies to help them achieve reading success.

For more information, contact Reggie Curran at rcurran@utk.edu or 865-974-1320.

**45th Annual Early
Childhood
Conference at ETSU
July 28 – 30, 2005**

Pre-K and kindergarten teachers and assistants from participating SIG schools are invited to attend ETSU's Early Childhood Conference in Johnson City, Tennessee. Educators from SIG schools are

entitled to travel stipends, lodging, registration, and some meals. In addition, several other special events have been created specifically for SIG participants. The conference will kick off with a special Thursday evening literacy dinner. This dinner will provide educators with the opportunity to meet authors Rebecca Isbell, Sharon MacDonald, and Ann Marie Leonard. As a special treat, Pam Schiller, author of over 30 books, including *Start Smart! Building Brain Power in the Early Years*, and senior author of the DLM Early Childhood Express (Wright Group), will be the featured speaker. In addition, a special literacy track was created for SIG participants that includes sessions planned to cover all aspects of literacy. Included in this track will be sessions by featured authors and literacy experts. **For more information, please contact SIG Project Coordinator Katherine DeVault at devault@etsu.edu or 423-439-7841.**

Keeping Kids Off the Summer Slide

Adapted and reprinted with permission from the Reading Is Fundamental web site <http://www.rif.org>.

Something is waiting for many children this summer, and their parents don't even know it's out there. It's called "summer slide," and it describes what happens when young minds sit idle for three months.

As parents approach the summer break, many are thinking about the family vacation, trips to the pool, how to keep children engaged in activities at home, the abrupt changes to everyone's schedule — and how to juggle it all. What they might not be focusing on is how much educational ground their children could lose during the three-month break from school, particularly when it comes to reading. Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the nation's oldest and largest children's literacy organization, believes there is no better time than this summer to begin helping our children bridge the gap in learning between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next one. "Motivating children to read throughout the year is essential to building lifelong readers," says Carol H. Rasco, president and CEO of RIF. "And reading is the doorway to all other learning."

Experts agree that children who read during the

Spotlight on SIG Partners

STEP is a partner in Tennessee's State Improvement Grant efforts. STEP is an acronym for "**Support and Training for Exceptional Parents.**" STEP's philosophy is that parents possess unique information about the developmental needs of their children and that they make an important contribution to the education of their children. Therefore, STEP believes that parents can and should become effective partners with professionals in planning and implementing appropriate programs for their children with special needs. STEP provides support to parents, providing help, training, and information to requesting parents.

STEP can help parents through the maze of changes resulting from the reauthorization of the IDEA. By understanding the IDEA guidelines, parents will be able to better access and utilize educational services available to their children, helping them to make progress toward their goals.

Two specific programs offered by STEP include:

- **The FAST Project: Families and Schools Together,** is



funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Programs. The program's purpose is to provide information, training, and services to parents of individuals with disabilities who are eligible to receive special education services.

- **The TRAC Project: On TRAC to Success, Transition and Rehabilitation Advocacy Center** is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration. The purpose is to provide information, training, and support to individuals with significant disabilities and to provide their parents and the people who serve them with support around issues of transition from school, employment, independent living, and community participation.

For more information about STEP, visit their web site at <http://www.tnstep.org> or call STEP's SIG representative, Alena Sampson, at 931-431-6644 or e-mail her at alena.sampson@tnstep.org.

summer gain reading skills, while those who do not often slide backward. According to the authors of a November 2002 report from Johns Hopkins Center for Summer Learning: "A conservative estimate of lost instructional time is approximately two months or roughly 22 percent of the school year...It's common for teachers to spend at least a month reteaching material that students have forgotten over the summer. That month of reteaching eliminates a month that could have been spent on teaching new information and skills."

Summer slide affects millions of children each year in this country—but it doesn't have to. To help prevent children from losing ground to summer slide, RIF has compiled a variety of activities that parents, caregivers, and members of community organizations can use to keep learning fun throughout the summer break.

Tips for Families:

- **Combine activities with books.** Summer leaves lots of time for kids to enjoy fun activities, such as going to the park, seeing a movie, or going to the beach.

Why not also encourage them to read a book about the activity? If you're going to a baseball game, suggest your child read a book about his or her favorite player beforehand. In the car or over a hot dog, you'll have lots of time to talk about the book and the game.

- **Visit the library.** If your child doesn't have a library card, summer is a great time to sign up. In addition to a wide selection of books to borrow, many libraries have fun, child-friendly summer reading programs.

- **Lead by example.** Read the newspaper at breakfast, pick up a magazine at the doctor's office, and stuff a paperback in your beach bag. If kids see the adults around them reading often, they will

understand that literature can be a fun and important part of their summer days.

- **Talk it up.** Talking with your kids about what you have read also lets them know that reading is an important part of your life. Tell them why you liked a book, what you learned from it, or how it helped you—soon they might start doing the same.

- **Help kids find time to read.** Summer camp, music lessons, baseball games, and videos are all fun things kids like to do during the summer. However, by the end of the day, children may be too tired to pick up a book. When planning summer activities with children, remember to leave some time in their schedules for reading. Some convenient times may be before bedtime or over breakfast.

- **Relax the rules for summer.** During the school year, children have busy schedules and often have required reading for classes. Summer is a time when children can read what, when, and how they please. Don't set daily minute requirements or determine the number of pages they should read. Instead, make sure they pick up books for fun and help find ways



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for them to choose to read on their own. You may even want to make bedtime a little bit later if you find that your child can't put down a book.

■ **Have plenty of reading material around.** Storybooks aren't the only thing that kids can read for fun. Be sure to have newspapers, magazines, and informational material on hand that might spark the interest of a young reader.

■ **Use books to break the boredom.** Without the regular school regimen, adults and kids need more activities to fill the hours. Books that teach kids how to make or do something are a great way to get kids reading and keep them occupied. Don't forget to take your kids' favorite reading series along on long road trips.

■ **Read aloud with kids.** Take your children to see a local storyteller or be one yourself. The summer months leave extra time for enthusiastic read-alouds with children no matter what their age. Don't forget to improvise different voices or wear a silly hat to make the story that much more interesting!

SIG staff have added some fun activities to encourage children to read and learn:

■ **Create reading incentives.** One mom created a "bookworm" by making a circle face, and taping it to a wall. She cut out 100 circles, and each time her children read a book, they wrote the title of the book and author on the circle and taped it behind the face. It was fun for the children to watch the worm grow longer as the summer wore on. Another mom made a reading jar. Each time her children read a book, she added a button to the jar. This idea could easily be adapted to other items, like pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters, which the children might keep.

■ **Create shopping lists with your child.** At the store, ask the child to read the items aloud and help you find them.

■ **Help your child create his own story book.** Help him jot down ideas and words and find pictures for illustration.

Use a spiral-bound notebook or bind the book together with ribbon when it is finished.

■ **Record your children reading a book and then replay it so they can listen to themselves read.** Repeat this activity so they can hear how they've improved over the summer.

■ **Have a family reading night.** Choose a theme, find a book, create a meal, and dress is an appropriate way that addresses the theme your family has selected.

■ **Create a summer journal,** either by writing three things that happened each day or by writing about the most exciting things your child had done each week. Supplement the journal with a box to collect treasures, such as seashells, maps, photos, drawings, and souvenirs from

places your family has been or things you've done.

■ **Create a conversation can.** Add handwritten questions that will get your family talking. During a weekly meal, have a family member pull out a question and start a family discussion. Questions could include such simple items as "If you could be any television character, who would it be?" or "If you could only choose one color to paint the whole world, what would it be and why?"

■ **After watching a television show or movie, go to the library and find a book about the topic.**

■ **Remember to make reading fun;** don't use it as a punishment by telling the kids to go to their rooms and read when they've misbehaved!

IDEA Revamped

One of the goals of Tennessee's State Improvement Grant is to assist schools in reforming and improving their educational, early intervention, teacher training and transitional services for students with disabilities. Because the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) impacts many of the schools and students targeted by SIG, we plan to keep you updated on IDEA rules and regulations. Congress recently approved several changes to the IDEA. These amendments potentially affect infants and toddlers receiving early intervention services, as well as public school students ages 3 to 22 who are receiving special education services.

The IDEA is the federal law mandating that all children with disabilities must have a free, appropriate education made available to them. The law was first passed by Congress in 1975 at a time when most children with

disabilities were not welcome in public schools and has been reauthorized several times. IDEA emphasizes special education and related services that meet the educational needs of children through an individualized education program (IEP). The goal of these services is to prepare students for future employment and independent living in the community.

Among the changes to IDEA is greater emphasis on preparation and training of special education teachers and paraprofessionals. The reauthorized law also sets goals for addressing graduation and drop-out rates for students with disabilities. Before these changes can be implemented, the U.S. Department of Education must develop regulations to explain and clarify how the law should be applied. Hearings have been held in several major cities across the country to invite public comment in advance of the regulations.

Several web sites offer helpful explanations of the new features of the IDEA. If you have an interest in knowing more about IDEA, check out these sites:

<http://www.cec.sped.org> (Council for Exceptional Children)

<http://edworkforce.house.gov/issues/108th/education/idea/idea.htm> (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce)

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/news/idea2002.htm> (Wrightslaw)

<http://www.reedmartin.com/amendingidea.htm> (Reed Martin, J.D.)

<http://www.napas.org> (National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems)

Tips for Teachers: Learning Stations

Learning stations, or learning centers, are an active way for individuals or groups to learn through experience. Over the years, learning centers have evolved from fun and socialization to an integral part of the academic learning environment. Learning centers help students make choices, expand oral communication, enhance creative abilities, develop social skills, understand others, develop responsibility, and learn persistence in task completion.



Learning stations are a good way to organize time in the classroom and provide the needed change in a routine while moving students around in an orderly fashion. They can also maximize the use of limited equipment or other resources. If you have only one computer in the classroom, making it one of the learning stations will provide more opportunities for use.

The keys to developing functional centers are planning, preparation, and accountability. These steps will enhance the center process:

1. Group students immediately. Heterogeneous grouping is more successful in most classes because each student will bring something to the center experience based on his abilities. While gifted students may bring academic skills to the group, a child who is artistically strong will add another dimension. Don't be afraid to change groups as needed. Incompatible personalities can be deadly. Change groups at least about every six weeks so students can expand social skills and learn from others. Groups should be limited to five students, and each group should be named to assist with assignments.

2. There should be at least five learning stations to allow students a different experience daily. To fully take advantage of center time, the focus should be on one center per group per

day. Centers should be age and skill appropriate. There should be materials in each learning center that captivate students' interests and provide the opportunity for independent achievement by each child. One center that should appear in all classes is a reading center, which may incorporate a computer with appropriate software, "talking" books, leveled readers, magazines, or other materials that focus on the act of reading. Two keys are important here. First, there must be a work product required of each student in the group. For example, if a gifted child and a child with lesser skills partner-read a book, some product should be produced by each. Students must know on the front end that center time does not equal play time! A basket placed in the center area is useful for collecting assignments. Second, the reading center should reflect the reading topic for the week. If students are reading a fictional story involving insects, such as *Two Bad Ants*, the reading center may contain books or other printed materials about insects from a nonfiction perspective.

3. A group assignment chart is also essential. (See sample at right.)

4. Resist the urge to expect miracles. Children are children, and the move from traditional seatwork brings out the best and the

worst in each of them. During the first few weeks of school, and around special events and holidays, expect to be on your feet, moving throughout the groups at all times.

5. Finally, if your room has limited space and materials, be creative! Suitcase centers can be very manageable. Label five canvas bags with center names and hang them on a peg in the corner. Students can take the bags

back to their seats to work, or they can work in the floor.

For more information about learning centers, read Isbell, R. (1995). *The complete learning center book*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House

For Parents: Why Do Teachers Use Learning Centers?

We know that young children learn best through active and meaningful activities that relate to their world. Learning centers (stations) capitalize on this strength in that the effective center encourages their involvement through experimentation and creativity. Centers allow children to try out ideas and test their own theories, while building confidence and encouraging cooperative work. In centers, children use language and expand their vocabulary; they develop responsibility; they improve social skills; and they build creative and problem-solving skills. Finally, when children work in centers, they are often working on projects that integrate skills from all subject areas instead of just one.

Group Names/Assignments	Red	Blue	Green	Yellow	Purple
Reading Center	M	T	W	TH	F
Writing Center	T	W	TH	F	M
Word Study/ Phonics Center	W	TH	F	M	T
Exploratory Center #1	TH	F	M	T	W
Exploratory Center #2	F	M	T	W	TH

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

Resources for Parents and Teachers

Resources for Parents

■ **Reading is Fun!** Whether you stay in your backyard or go on vacation, make reading a part of your summer journey. You can sit by the pool and read about a far-off land, read a book to pass long hours traveling, or even go visit a place you've read about. RIF has plenty of ideas to keep reading a part of vacation, with fun activities, helpful tips, and articles on getting kids to love reading in their free time.

<http://www.rif.org/summer/default.msp>

■ **Florida's Just Read, Families' web site** lists publications for parents explaining why reading is so important. Also includes summer activities calendars for K-5 and middle school children, as well as an activities kit that includes creative ideas for fun summer reading you and your children can do together while on vacation, at home, or on the road.

<http://www.justreadfamilies.org/greatideas/>

■ **Family Fun!** Disney's online family fun site has many ideas for summer fun, including recipes, crafts, movie lists, and reading lists.

<http://familyfun.go.com/>

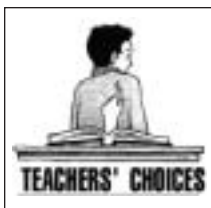
Resources for Teachers

■ Lessons with a summer theme –

<http://atozteacherstuff.com/Themes/Summer/>

■ **International Reading Association Teachers' Choices:** The Teachers' Choices logo that Chris Van Allsburg created illuminates the idea that good books reach out and tap us on the shoulder to get our attention. Are there books that you would add to your own list of choices for students?

http://www.reading.org/resources/tools/choices_teachers.html



SIG Contacts

The purpose of the State Improvement Grant is to increase reading achievement through the enhancement of professional development for teachers in our SIG schools and the preschools that feed into those schools and through increased family involvement in schools. Because there are many facets of the program, we have assigned specific people to answer your questions or to give you direction about who can help you with your concerns. Please find the area in which your concern lies, and contact the person listed.

- **For information about becoming a SIG school, or about the grant in general,** contact Harolyn Hatley, SIG Project Director, 615-532-1659, Harolyn.Hatley@state.tn.us
- **For information concerning family issues,** contact Dara Howe, Family Voices Tennessee Director, 615-383-9442, familyvoices@tndisability.org
- **For information about preschool and kindergarten issues,** contact Katherine DeVault, East Tennessee State University SIG Coordinator, 423-439-7841, devault@etsu.edu
- **For information about grade 1-12 issues,** contact Suzy Page, University of Memphis SIG Coordinator, 901-678-4865, spage1@memphis.edu
- **For information about the newsletter, web site, and calendar activities,** contact Reggie Curran, University of Tennessee SIG Coordinator, 865-974-1320, rcurran@utk.edu

Check out Tennessee's SIG website at
<http://sig.cls.utk.edu>