

Reading program key to student success

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

Students at Sisters Elementary School have a team of people looking to ensure all students are provided the instructional support they need to make them successful.

One of the key pieces is the reading program.

Stephanie Jensen, the Title I Reading Specialist, along with Kori Cantrell, the special education teacher, and other teachers and administrators work to “close the achievement gap” for all students by working together to develop reading skills early.

The Federal Title I Program is one of the nation’s oldest and largest federally funded programs for education — around \$14 billion annually. The original Title I program was enacted in 1965 within the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to bridge the discrepancy between low-income students and other students. In 1994, the policy was rewritten to include helping all students at risk of failing.

A recent revision of the original act, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will continue academic support for students regardless

of outside factors like race, income, zip code, home language and others.

In Sisters School District staff and administrators review all students’ progress three times a year.

“It really is a team effort,” Jensen says. “Parents are the students’ first teachers. We try to create a partnership between classroom teachers, parents and specialists in order to best serve each student.”

While all students are provided with strong skills-based core instruction in the classroom, students that may need additional academic support in reading and math are identified. This multi-tiered level of support allows for additional instruction and parent participation.

“Outside programs like SMART (Start Making A Reader Today) are wonderful to help focus on early literacy,” says Sisters Elementary School Principal Becky Stoughton. “The SMART program’s involvement in the SPRD Community Preschool helps to support Sisters younger learners. Parents can help at home too by reading to their children every night.

“Research shows that if parents and guardians read to their children, they will

become stronger readers,” says Stoughton. “Reading to children from birth to school-age years also helps to begin early literacy skills and support what we are doing in the classroom.”

Through the identification process, students who demonstrate a need for support and small group intervention are typically placed with between four and five students with similar skill levels.

“We try to get to know the students as a whole, as a collaboration between the student, the teacher and a specialist,” says Jensen. “When the kids come to group we work to help grow their skills.”

Community members may remember specialized reading instruction as being a disruption to the school day. Students used to have to miss out on a class like PE, music or art to attend a special reading study group. All that has changed.

“The older model didn’t feel good for the students,” says Jensen. “They felt as though they were missing



PHOTO BY ERIN BORLA

Reading is the most important component of student success.

out on something they really enjoyed — like art or PE — in order to be in the reading program which led to the group being less successful. Now, we try to schedule the specialized program at a time that works well for the students. It’s very fluid — it moves from room to room and even instructor to instructor.”

Those students who receive specialized instruction have their progress monitored frequently. If, after a period of instruction

in the small groups, there is still a concern, school staff

See **READING** on page 9

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