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## Everybody benefits when one generation helps another

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For 20 years, two generations have gathered in Lawrence Township elementary schools to share the gifts of reading and writing.

Adults from the OASIS program tutor select elementary students once a week, an activity that benefits both parties and helps school districts on tight budgets obtain much-needed volunteers.

Students work to advance their reading skills, while volunteers age 50 and older stay young at heart.

"It's an added advantage for the children," said Lawrence Township Schools program coordinator Barbara Stryker. "We don't have test data, but we know it helps their reading."

Tutors sign up through OASIS, and teachers recommend students in kindergarten through Grade 4 who need a little push to become independent readers, said Stryker, who pairs adults and students.

Stryker trains tutors in sessions about once a month to help them plan age-appropriate lessons and inform them about

the newest teaching methodology. Tutors start at the beginning of each semester.

"We use the term 'forever young,' " Stryker said. "There is a need for mature citizens to give back. It's to help people stay young, active, moving and thinking. For children, it's one-on-one attention that's nonjudgmental."

Each tutoring session has six components: read to the child, talk together, write together, read the child's writing, work with books or writing, and review and reread.

In Lawrence Township, 67 tutors work with 75 children. Kindergartners get 30 minutes with tutors, and older students spend an hour with tutors outside of class. Tutoring doesn't take away time from critical language arts instruction, Stryker said.

Shirley Jones, a charter member of the Lawrence tutoring group, travels weekly from Warren Township. Even though the Eastside district now offers a similar program, Jones continues in Lawrence.

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"It's because of the children," Jones said. "You really bond with them. They run up and hug you, and you have to be there because they look forward to that time. It's a great program."

Tutors such as Jones first have to be part of OASIS programming before they can tutor students, Stryker said. It might be the only personal attention some children get from an adult all week.

Peter Johnson Jr., a retired veterinarian, is paired with a kindergarten student. Working with the youngest children can be a challenge for him, he admits, simply because their skills aren't as advanced as older students, and their attention spans are shorter.

"I make games for them to play where they can still learn," Johnson said.

"It's a very good program. I've gained from the program, and I hope the students have."

Christine Curtis, whose children graduated from Lawrence Township, tutors a kindergartner and second-grader.

"I was a stay-at-home mom, and I have the luxury of time," said Curtis who formerly mentored at Lawrence North. "I wanted to give something back. With a smaller budget and fewer teachers, I felt like this is something I can do to help. The one-on-one time is so critical."

OASIS tutors also work with children in the Indianapolis-area school districts of B

rownsburg, Greenwood, Hamilton Southeastern, and Perry, Pike, Warren, Washington and Wayne townships.

For more information, call Rita Covely at (317) 966-6924.

**Call Star reporter Gretchen Becker at (317) 444-6198.**



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Skiles Test Elementary fourth-grader Javonn Gray uses a computer to take a test on a book he read with OASIS volunteer tutor Jay Hufferd. / Steve Sanchez / The Star

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