

READY for the Grade 2020 – Killingly Report

Evaluator: Anita M. Baker, Ed.D.

Evaluation Services, Lambertville, NJ

Killingly conducted an in-person, one-on-one tutoring program for 6 weeks at the main library site. Additionally, one-on-one tutoring was held at the Village at Killingly twice per week for three weeks. A total of 25 students got instruction (including craft applications) and received books, and had access to the library. While no formal family events were held, instructors worked closely with parents/guardians to ensure the children were doing program homework and reading on their own and with family members. The program was designed and overseen by Allison Whiston, Children and Teen Librarian of the Killingly Public Library, and staffed by two local teachers and two paraprofessionals who had all worked with the READY for the Grade program in the past. Throughout the summer they provided on-site, customized one-on-one tutoring and enrichment activities. The program met enrollment and attendance goals and was well received by both the children and their family members. Participants received the support they needed to maintain or build up their reading skills, they increased their confidence regarding reading, they accessed instructionally appropriate books, earned incentives, and were excited to come to the program to participate. Details about the program follow.

Program Implementation

Individual Tutoring. Each student was assigned to one of the two teachers based on their grade level (K – 1; 2 – 3) and then worked 1:1, in person in the library, or outside in the tent at the Village at Killingly (VAK), with their assigned staff member. During the sessions the children at the library participated in customized individual tutoring that was followed by an enrichment/craft activity related to the weekly theme or a specific story, for a total of one-hour of instruction each week; at VAK, the same strategy was used but the total number of program weeks was limited to three (due to COVID-19 regulations) and sessions were conducted twice weekly (4 students participated). In addition to the tutoring sessions, children were assigned specific homework/at-home activities that family members were asked to oversee and each child received 1 – 2 free books each session and could also select library books while on site. The program was operational when the library was closed to outside visitors and children and instructors were separated by plexiglass dividers. All adults (including parents/guardians) wore masks at all times while engaged with the program participants, and while children were excited to see other participants, with the exception of some limited interaction during the craft/enrichment activities, these were individual sessions. Appropriate social distancing and hand sanitizing was consistently maintained.

Parent Engagement. As stated above, there were no formal activities for parents, but teachers regularly interacted with them regarding participants' plans and progress. The sessions were set up for the parents/guardians to schedule individually with the tutor at a mutually convenient time and parents stayed on premises while their children participated. This provided an opportunity for staff to provide feedback on children's progress and to update parents/guardians on what they would be working on each week. Staff clarified in the post-program evaluation interview that parent contact was much better during summer 2020, especially as there was additional clarity and advice regarding the specific work,

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children were excited to show their parents what they learned, and everyone (parent/guardian/teacher/child) was interested in the activities and assignments.

Incentives. Children earned \$10 each week for their participation which could later be used for prizes or school supplies. All children also received a back pack at the beginning of the summer and free books weekly. The craft activities were also used as an incentive/reward to help keep children focused during their sessions.

Enrollment

As shown in table 4a, the Killingly READY for the Grade program served 25 children summer 2020. It can be seen in the table that the grade levels and descriptive characteristics of those who participated during summer 2020 were somewhat different than the group that participated in 2019 as recruitment was more challenging.

- The program served rising 1st (20%) 2nd (32%) and 3rd graders (40%), and a few 4th grade alumni or siblings; a total of 56% were females, 44% were males.
- The student group was somewhat less diverse in terms of race/ethnicity than it had been in 2019; 13% of participants were identified as Hispanic/Latinx, 75% were identified as White/Caucasian and 13%, were identified as biracial.
- All but two students spoke English as their primary language at home, 1 student (4%) spoke Spanish at home and 1 student identified Portuguese as his primary language.

See Table 4a on next page for Killingly’s Enrollment Details

(Note* Grade level enrollment requirements were relaxed somewhat for 2020.)

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| Table 4a: Enrollment Details, Killingly | 2020 N=25 | 2019 N=31 |
|--|----------------------|--------------|
| Grade in Fall | | |
| PK/Kindergarten* | 0 | 0 |
| First Grade | 20% | 32% |
| Second Grade | 32% | 35% |
| Third Grade | 40% | 32% |
| Fourth Grade* | 8% | |
| Gender | | |
| Female | 56% | 55% |
| Male | 44% | 45% |
| Race/Ethnicity | | |
| Asian | 0 | 0 |
| Black/African American | 0 | 3% |
| Hispanic/Latinx | 13% | 26% |
| Native American | 0 | 3% |
| White | 75% | 61% |
| Biracial | 13% | 6% |
| Primary Language at Home | | |
| English | 92% | 27% |
| Spanish and English | 4% | 39% |
| Other (see above) | 4% | 33% |

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Attendance

Review of attendance records for the Killingly READY for the Grade program summer 2020 showed that most participants attended very regularly.

- In total Killingly provided 140 hours of programming to the 25 students.
- On average each student received 5.6 total hours.
- More than half (56%) of the participants, including all those from the Village at Killingly site, accessed every available session, and all but 3 others accessed at least 5 of the 6 sessions.

Every participant was encouraged to do daily practice work and to read regularly between sessions.

Achievement

A total of 23 students participated in a reading assessment¹ during an initial and final tutoring session. Of these, all but 1 maintained (50%) or improved their scores (50%). Like the other RfG sites that were able to tests their students, **these participants did not loose ground over the summer.** Teachers commented additionally in the final post-program interview that students had enhanced their reading confidence and had always been excited to come to the program and to the library. They wanted the books and were eager to show their parents/guardians skills such as increased fluency and ability to self-correct that they were developing. The teachers also reported that the 1:1 sessions made it easier to work on the specific skills participants needed, that there were few attention issues, and that they could get more work done each week because the sessions were personalized. They also pointed out that they really appreciated the opportunity to be in-person with the children since they had not seen any students for many months by the time the summer program started. (Note that for most participants there were only 5 weeks between tests. Killingly will also be collecting from the schools the reading levels in spring and fall but know that there will be some inconsistencies due to the sudden school closures.)

Killingly Easy CBM Reading Assessments, Summer 2020

Rising 1st graders took Pre - Phoneme Segmenting K_1 & Post - Phoneme Segmenting K_2

Rising 2nd graders took: Pre - Passage Reading Fluency 1_1 & Post - Passage Reading Fluency 1_2

Rising 3rd graders took Pre - Passage Reading Fluency 2_1 & Post - Passage Reading Fluency 2_5

Rising 4th graders took the same test as the 3 graders.

There were a few challenged readers who took the phoneme segmenting test instead of the passage reading test.

Teachers reported that a few students who scored a little lower did not engage effectively with the assessment though the teachers had seen them use the skills during other interactions. With such a short time period and many other restrictions, it was challenging to reinforce good testing practices.

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Parent/Guardian Feedback

A total of 12 parents/guardians answered a brief survey² about the READY for the Grade (Remarkable Readers) summer program in Killingly, 2020. As shown in Table 4b, and the following comments, all or almost all parents verified that their children benefitted from participating in RfG summer 2020. Additionally, all respondents rated the program leaders excellent and all but one (who said maybe) reported they planned to sign up again next summer.

Table 4b: Parent/Guardian Feedback, Killingly, READY for the Grade, 2020

| | 2020 |
|---|-------------|
| | N=12 |
| % who rated the program <i>excellent</i> on a scale ranging from poor to fair to good to excellent | 100% |
| % who rated the staff <i>excellent</i> on a scale ranging from poor to fair to good to excellent | 100% |
| % who reported the Remarkable Readers Program was <i>important</i> (17%) or <i>very important</i> (83%) | 100% |
| % who answered yes to the following | |
| As a result of participating my child/children read more over the summer | 100% |
| As a result of participating, my child/children feel more confident reading | 100% |
| As a result of participating my family was inspired to read more over the summer | 92% |
| We will sign up again next summer | 92% |

| What did you like about the program? | What do you feel your child gained? |
|---|---|
| <p><i>My kids taking their time to read also great to earn free books to read at home really inspired them</i></p> <p><i>I like that they made reading fun and did a craft as well. Work sent home helped as well</i></p> | <p><i>Keep practicing reading also being able to connect with other kids.</i></p> <p><i>Confidence!</i></p> |

² The parent survey was administered by Evaluation Services for this report. Some parents had more than one child participating.

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| <p><i>My daughter loved going. It was good practice for her wearing a mask and interacting with other people other than her usual teachers</i></p> <p><i>With the Covid-19, and all the things that were cancelled, this was a little bit of normalcy for my son. He seemed to enjoy going.</i></p> <p><i>The enthusiasm of the teachers. The one on one situation. The ability for the students to pick their own books to keep.</i></p> <p><i>The program in general was just over all amazing thank you all!</i></p> <p><i>The one on one support and guidance, weekly assignment to complete at home for extra practice, provided free books at her level every week! We were both very satisfied with everything about this program!!</i></p> | <p><i>I think program help my son maintain reading level he had in kindergarten</i></p> <p><i>Hopefully some confidence in his reading.</i></p> <p><i>Confidence and reading experience. They looked forward to going each session.</i></p> <p><i>It was so much fun for her and a great way to keep her mind busy</i></p> <p><i>Confidence, fluency,</i></p> <p><i>Confidence and more skills</i></p> |
|--|--|

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Conclusions and Issues for Further Consideration

The Killingly READY for the Grade program had to make major shifts for summer 2020, but they were still able to utilize the library facility effectively and they made welcomed changes to their strategy which are likely to be continued for future summers. Most notably, as described, they shifted from a group tutoring strategy to a one-on-one strategy, and while they were not able to involve any additional summer volunteers as they had in the past and only minimally utilized any virtual programming,³ veteran key RfG staff worked very effectively with students, complementary art enrichment activities were made possible, there was a continuous focus on access to appropriate books and increased parent interaction was promoted. The results, illustrated by consistent attendance, positive teacher and standardized reading assessment data and especially positive feedback from parents provided clear evidence of success.

The staff reported that despite the challenges of operating during the pandemic, they were able to work very consistently with children and to encourage home-based assignments too. Both parents/guardians and children were very respectful of the social distancing rules and other sanitation requirements, and as staff reported, both parents/guardians and children were very excited about coming to the program and having the chance to have experienced teachers working with the students. Responses to the parent surveys were replete with praise for the teaching staff. **Killingly hopes to incorporate some of the summer 2020 strategies for summer 2021, moving to smaller groups, extended programming and continued efforts to involve parents/guardians including possibly conducting a family day and definitely continuing homework and free levelled book distribution. Additional parent comments (see box at right) show that these changes, especially extended programming both for older children and for longer duration, including the school year, would be welcomed.**

Parent Comments about Staff

All staff was friendly and my son loved them.

My daughter loved everyone!

The staff was awesome.

They showed creativity, patience, understanding, and fortitude.

They were all amazing and so helpful and he loved going

Super good staff.

Parent Summary Comments and suggestions for the Future

No cost was a huge help especially being out of work. But my son gained more confidence. And it was local which was great. I wish it was all year.

Let children continue up to the end of 6th grade especially if they are weak in reading.

Let students with reading problems continue past your age limit. It would be a tremendous resource for them.

I'd love to see a year-round program like this. I'd even pay a small fee. It helped him so much and he loved going.

³ The Killingly site did encourage parents/guardians to have their children tune into Turtle Dance Music virtual programming, but they did not track utilization and were not sure whether children took advantage of this or any other virtual options.

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Instructor working one-on-one with student, note plexiglass divider to left. Killingly 2020