NATIONAL PROGRAM “INSTILLS LOVE OF READING”

By Georgia Williamson, The Georgetown Times reporter

For the past two academic years, students at Carvers Bay Middle School have been taking advantage of a nation-wide program that is improving local students’ reading skills.

This reading enrichment program, as it is called at Carvers Bay Middle, is helping low literacy students at rural schools, said Darryl Stanley, principal at Carvers Bay Middle School.

The Talent Development Middle Grades (TDMG) program was created by the Center for Social Organization of Schools, which is part of Johns Hopkins University in Maryland.

According to the official TDMG website, the program is specifically designed for K-8 and middle schools that serve disadvantaged students, and it has proven successful in helping schools narrow the achievement gap between high-poverty schools and wealthier schools.

The program offers standards-based, facilitated instructional programs in reading/English/language arts, mathematics, science and U.S. history. But Stanley said the reading program is really making a difference because his students can relate to the books they are reading and enjoy the story lines. By far, Continued on page 6

MATH LAB PROMOTES SUCCESS AT MINNESOTA MIDDLE SCHOOL

By Cheryl Kanyok

Talent Development Middle Grades schools are committed to providing challenging learning opportunities for all students, and setting high standards in math. But how can we help students who need a little boost, or who may have fallen behind because of an illness or an extended absence, to jump into math proficiency? How do we provide an extra challenge for students who can Continued on page 2
**FIRST YEAR TEACHER RAISES THE BAR**

By Dr. Cathy Sweeney

During a recent visit as a Johns Hopkins University facilitator at Raub Middle School in Allentown, Pennsylvania, I asked seventh grade math teacher Laura Gerlach how many years she has been teaching. To my surprise, she said this was her first year.

It is no secret that skillful classroom management, good organization, and clever pedagogy are key to staging a good learning environment. Ms. Gerlach has mastered it all, and has accomplished it in her first year of teaching.

Routines are evident and procedures are in place as Ms. Gerlach guides her students through a lesson. Students are in groups and cooperative learning is encouraged. “Thank you” and “please” are used by teacher and students, which contributes to the mutual respect witnessed in all of her classes. Ms. Gerlach addresses problems immediately and uses positive reinforcement to maintain control. It is apparent that the focus of her classes is teaching and learning. Kudos Ms. Gerlach for a job well done.

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**CATAMA MATH LAB**

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go beyond what is being taught in the regular math class? A double-dose of math has proven to be a more effective route than pulling students from a regular math class or providing after-school tutoring.

At Cass Lake Bena Middle School, selected students receive a double-dose of instructional math support to reach their academic goals. The Minnesota school’s CATAMA Lab (Computer and Team Assisted Mathematics Acceleration), developed by TDMG, is under the direction of Dawn Seopa. The lab services five classes a day, four days per week, setting aside the fifth day for students to attend an elective of their choice.

CATAMA combines the targeted intervention of individualized computer-based instruction, the motivating aspects of partnership and team-assisted learning, and the power of small group, individualized, and whole-group instruction, to accelerate student progress. Because of this unique design and its integration of best practices and pedagogy CATAMA enables students to become critical thinkers, independent learners, and team players.

Immediately upon entering the classroom, students begin with a problem-of-the day, skill review, vocabulary review, or journal prompt. After this warm-up, each partnership resumes its computer assignments, with Mrs. Seopa providing small-group instruction for any partners needing assistance. Students receive certificates of mastery for each set of math subtopics they learn.

At first, students were skeptical about the double-dose of math, but as they began to realize the benefits of extra help, many have asked to return on a Friday elective day.

Mr. Steve Novak, the principal at Cass Lake Middle School, implemented several incentives for those participating in the program. Students may select a Friday elective, attend a monthly pizza party, and take a charter bus trip to Valley Fair, a local amusement park, on May 17.

Mrs. Seopa initially wondered if she could juggle all the elements of the CATAMA lab. But in just a few months, she has mastered the math software classroom management system, and has established a comfortable and inviting teaching and learning environment that maximizes time on task. Students are learning teamwork, enjoying the benefits of small-group and individualized instruction, and seeing the instructor as more of a facilitator as they take charge of their own learning.
By Linda Andersen

During my recent visit to Carvers Bay Middle School in South Carolina, I heard an inspiring story from sixth grade teacher Sherrie Cabanaw Myers. Ms. Myers teaches social studies and a daily enrichment class in which teachers use the TDMG Student Team Literature program. She has been teaching about ancient Greece, and showed a cartoon version of Homer’s classic epic The Odyssey as one of her culminating activities. When it was time to choose a book to read in the enrichment class, her students begged for The Odyssey. Though she had some concern that the book (a prose version adapted for middle school use) might be somewhat above her students’ reading level, she decided to give it a try.

Carvers Bay administers state tests in early May, so at this time of year teachers review and prepare students for the tests. Ms. Myers noted that “By the time the students get to enrichment (period 5 of a 6 period day), all they want to do is read.” So, that is what she is letting them do. Students spend most of the time reading, but they also discuss the book. They are also connecting with what they have previously learned in social studies.

Evan Moulton, one of Ms. Myers’ students, was upset when he saw the book the class would use. He had assumed that they would read the unabridged, “real” Odyssey, which is written on a high school reading level. He went to the school Media Center but found no copy there. Evan then went to the public library and checked out a copy, which included both The Iliad and The Odyssey.

The dictionary defines an odyssey as “a long wandering; an intellectual or spiritual quest.” I asked Evan why he was so motivated to pursue his reading odyssey. “I was hoping to learn more,” he said. “I had already borrowed a book of Greek myths from my teacher. I like… to learn about their society and way of life. I guess I got it from my dad because he likes to read a lot. I’m reading The Iliad first because it has the back story about Odysseus.”

I suggested that it would be wonderful if he could write a compare/contrast paper focusing on the original epic in relation to the adapted version. He answered, “That is my intention.”

Evan has already finished the class book, so he spends time in class and at home reading the complete Odyssey.

The TDMG Student Team Literature program has as one of its goals fostering a love for reading. This young man’s enthusiasm and desire to go beyond the classroom is exactly what we hope to see as students improve their skills and develop a love for the printed word. Thank you, Ms. Myers, for making learning exciting. Thank you, Evan, for reaching higher! ♦

TEXAS TEACHER RECOGNIZED FOR CREATIVE WRITING

Congratulations to Guadalupe McCall of McAuliffe Junior High School in San Antonio, Texas, who was recently accepted in the online directory of Poets and Writers. Poets and Writers, Inc., is America’s largest nonprofit literary organization serving creative writers. Ms. McCall has written for Borderlands, Bilingual Review, Classroom Notes Plus, and other journals.

Ms. McCall has taught for 18 years, and is enjoying implementing TDMG Student Team Literature. She believes the program’s Discussion Guides “make teaching literature accessible and highly effective. I find myself structuring other lessons in my repertoire in the same manner.” ♦
TEXAS TEACHERS WRITE ON TARGET

By Maria Garriott

Teachers at Sharon Christa McAuliffe Junior High School and Ronald E. McNair Sixth Grade School near San Antonio, Texas, recently completed professional development focused on improving student writing. Carol Williams, a reading/English language arts facilitator with the Johns Hopkins University Talent Development Middle Grades program, modeled activities to help students create outlines, narrow topics, and compose extended constructed responses.

Extended constructed responses, which are similar to essays, are required writing on middle and high school assessments and other standardized tests. They may be found in any content area, and usually require students to give a personal or persuasive response to a question or issue.

Teachers engaged in activities they will soon model for their own students. They narrowed topics, created and sequenced outlines, and stood in line to illustrate an extended constructed response. Teachers sported colored Post-It notes to identify themselves as part of either introductory, body, or concluding paragraphs. Concluding sentences and introductory sentences linked hands to illustrate connections between paragraphs.

“According to the National Council of Teachers of English, we as teachers are the best models for writing. Our models of writing are a powerful teaching tool; we show students that we value the assignment enough to do it ourselves,” Ms. Williams noted.

Ms. Williams was struck by the quality of the teachers’ writing samples. “These teachers demonstrated strong writing skills as well as a willingness to share their writing.” With exemplary modeling, dedicated professionals, and new instructional tools, can student success be far behind?
The Talent Development Schoolwide Climate Program seeks to motivate students to comply with school rules and excel academically and socially. One of the ways this is addressed is by implementing “Caught You Doing Something Good!” Schools often adapt the name of this component to reflect the school culture. For example, McGinnis Middle School in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, calls it “Caught You Being A Howling Success,” after the school mascot, a wolf. At the Baltimore Talent Development High School, it is called “Caught You Being A Star,” after the school emblem.

The name may change but the premise remains the same. When teachers or other adults observe positive student behavior, they reward the student with tickets or coupons. Tickets are the first level of incentive for students who seem starved for positive feedback. Students feel appreciated and cared for by the ticket giver. Most students cherish the tickets and are happy to receive them.

The second level of incentives occurs each month during lunchtime rallies, when a facilitator randomly selects several tickets and awards prizes. The rallies are festively decorated with balloons that read “Congratulations” or “You Are Special.” The prizes are displayed in bright, beautiful gift bags.

Lunchtime rallies are a big hit because they provide an opportunity for students to have fun. A familiar statement heard throughout public education is that we no longer allow children to be children. Recess has disappeared in most schools, and quite often, art and music are phased out as well. Students are under a great deal of pressure to do well on standardized tests. Class periods may be twice as long in math and language arts. Cafeterias are strictly regimented so that students have only a brief time to eat, clean up, and return to class. These lunchtime rallies generate a cheerful atmosphere.

Of course, not all students can be rewarded with prizes, but because the rallies are held monthly, students have many chances to win. Even if a student does not receive a prize, he or she often experiences a vicarious joy when a friend or classmate wins. Students are encouraged to tell their families about their award.

The cost of each gift is minimal at about $6.00 per student. Fortunately, children are easy to please. Cute, colorful school supplies are always a hit. Dollar stores carry small staplers, large packs of holiday pencils, pens of many varieties, calculators, photo albums, calendars, address books, umbrellas, or erasers. They also carry interesting gift bags that represent different cultures, such as African American and Latino. McDonald’s gift certificates delight everyone. A $5.00 gift certificate is enough to pay for an entire meal. Even teachers want these.

The fact that a member of the faculty facilitates the rally offers another level of incentive. All too often administrative interaction with students is in the form of disciplinary measures. Here is a rare opportunity to demonstrate that adults notice students’ hard work and can have fun with them. At Pickett Middle School in Philadelphia, faculty members joke that there are Ipods or keys to cars in the gift bags. The gift bags are lauded as works of art that are very valuable. Students hold their breath in anticipation during long pauses before the facilitator calls the winner’s name. Laughter abounds.

At the Perth Amboy Accelerated High School, Dr. Robles, the principal, holds an uplifting celebration each month in which she recognizes students with perfect attendance and “Caught You Doing Something Good!” winners. These students receive McDonald’s coupons. At lunch time, the winners head for the nearest McDonald’s and enjoy the meal as if dining at a five-star restaurant.

The Talent Development Schoolwide Climate Program helps students enjoy school while feeling nurtured, cared for, and appreciated. “Caught You Doing Something Good!” is just one of these incentives.
SIXTH GRADERS ASK TO “AUDIT” THE CATAMA LAB

By Dr. Cathy Sweeney

Sixth graders at Tree of Life Charter School in Washington, D.C., are pleading with CATAMA lab teacher James Gaines to allow them to attend CATAMA during their free time. Because these students are not part of the CATAMA schedule, they must use the math lab after school.

In the CATAMA lab, laptops are available for each student. Mr. Gaines stresses talking and writing about math throughout the period. In a typical warm-up activity, students may select a topic from one of the math modules, describe it, and write a short description. Students work independently as Mr. Gaines moves from student to student providing guidance and assistance. Teaching students to work cooperatively in partnerships allows him to facilitate and provide small group instruction, creating an ideal teaching and learning environment.

Mr. James Gaines assists Tree of Life Charter School students in the CATAMA lab.

NATIONAL PROGRAM “INSTILLS LOVE OF READING”

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students’ favorite book is Beowulf: A Retelling, a rewrite of the Old English tale of monsters and bravery. Students are also reading books about children living in high-crime areas, children living with a single parent and the plight of a homeless man.

“The program offers more than what’s in our textbooks,” Stanley said. “If we didn’t have this program, students wouldn’t even be exposed to some of these subjects.”

Students in grades six through eight participate in the reading enrichment program for an hour each school day. Based on students’ past PACT scores, they are assigned to reading classes based on their ability, with more advanced students reading books at a higher grade level containing more complex ideas.

During this hour, students read and study vocabulary words, answer discussion questions, do extension activities and take part in literature-related writing.

This curriculum, which is different for each book, is provided by the TDMG program at Johns Hopkins, Stanley said. Carvers Bay Middle School teachers went through three days of training by the Johns Hopkins staff before the school adopted the program, and a Hopkins facilitator visits the school each month.

Stanley’s administrative staff was looking for a reading program when assistant principal David Hammel learned about TDMG on the Internet. Although the school was looking for such a reading program because PACT scores showed that students were struggling with reading and language arts, Stanley hopes the program will ultimately give his students an appreciation for reading. “What we want to instill is a love of reading,” he said.

In accordance with the TDMG program, the school has also created a support group for “nonreaders,” students who have a particularly hard time and thus do not enjoy reading.

Stanley believes Carvers Bay Middle School is the only South Carolina school currently using the TDMG program, but that may soon change. At the recent S.C. School Boards Association’s annual meeting, guests were intrigued when Stanley explained the program and its benefits.

Carvers Bay Middle has also been using the TDMG math program for two years and implemented the science program this academic year.

To learn more about the TDMG program, visit http://web.jhu.edu/CSOS/tdmg.

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By Ann Maouyo

*Dragonwings*, Laurence Yep’s Newbery Medal-winning novel, is set in San Francisco at the turn of the twentieth century. It is the fascinating first-person account of Moon Shadow, a young Chinese immigrant who arrives in America to join his idealistic father, Windrider. Windrider’s name reflects his dream in life: to soar above the earth in a “flying machine” of his own design.

This ambitious goal leads Windrider and Moon Shadow away from the tight-knit Chinese immigrant community. As they make their way in the unfamiliar world of American culture, they experience both prejudice and warm friendship, and they come to a new appreciation of family relationships.

History tie-ins include the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and the Wright brothers’ invention of the airplane. Young readers will gain valuable insights into Chinese culture and the immigrant experience as they enjoy this well-written, suspenseful work of historical fiction.

The *Dragonwings* Discussion Guide is available in Student Team Literature’s new format, featuring spiral-bound Teacher’s Discussion Guides with wide margins for notetaking and Student’s Discussion Guides with ample space to write answers to questions and activities.

**MAKING IT ALL LOOK EASY**

By Dr. Cathy Sweeney

As the instructional curriculum facilitator for math at McAuliffe Junior High School in San Antonio, Texas, Tina Meier is responsible for scheduling and attending department meetings, bridging the communication gap between school-based and central administration and the math department, and meeting deadlines for endless paperwork. She is continually disaggregating data and mentoring new teachers. Ms. Meier accomplishes all of this while teaching six periods a day and tutoring at lunchtime. She also has the uncanny ability to make it all look easy.

Ms. Meier respects other teachers’ ideas and listens to their concerns. She is open to all of the JHU facilitator’s suggestions and is willing to be the first to try something different. She also creates the schedule for the monthly JHU visits. As a mentor, she will stop what she is doing and lend a hand or an ear. One new teacher referred to her as an “awesome mentor.” She is always willing to share her ideas, resources, activities and valuable time to help others be effective and successful. An administrator in the building recently said, “Imagine a whole school with teachers like Tina Meier! Wow!”
NEW TDMG WEBSITE LAUNCHED

By Maria Garriott

The Talent Development Middle Grades program recently launched its redesigned website. The new design is part of a Johns Hopkins University initiative to create graphically compatible websites across the university’s many centers and divisions.

The new TDMG site features pull-down menus with information about the program, subject-area specifics, professional development, current research, and curriculum ordering information. The opening page features announcements about conferences and upcoming events.

TDMG Implementation Director Kathy Nelson recognizes the importance of a strong Internet presence. “The website is an important initial point of contact for education professionals. It’s a vital tool for those interested in the middle grades, as it provides access to solid research to guide them in their decisions.”

More than a dozen research papers on the site document the success of the TDMG program and other important middle level research.

The redesigned store feature on the site will make it easier for schools and individuals to order Discussion Guides or other materials. An updated catalog includes the latest information on Discussion Guides and standardized reading practice tests, which are available for many books. The site will soon be able to take credit card payments online.

The website now includes a pull-down tab for home schoolers because of the interest and enthusiasm many have expressed for curriculum developed by TDMG.

While Internet users are redirected from TDMG’s old address, the new site can be found directly at http://web.jhu.edu/CSOS/tdmg.