



COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS PACESETTER

RICHMOND, IND.

Category: Campaign Leadership

The city of Richmond, on the eastern edge of Indiana, has put together a model program for combatting the summer learning loss that low-income students can experience during the three months away from school and educational activities. The Third Grade Reading Academy, started five years ago by two Richmond businessmen, combines public and private funding to benefit the city's struggling readers during the summer months.

The Richmond community eagerly responded to the idea and pulled together \$150,000 in contributions ranging from \$10 to \$20,000 in the first year.

While the initial idea was to hold the academy in the local middle school, teachers had a better plan. "Kids don't really look forward to going back to school in the summer," notes Vic Jose, a former school board member who was one of the founders of the Third Grade Reading Academy. To give the academy a different feeling from school, "we decentralized the academy to a variety of different locations," he said. The first summer's classes were held anywhere but school – at the local historical museum, a swimming pool, a wellness center, the public library and the university athletic center.

While attendance was always over 90 percent, the academy created a volunteer corps of "Good Shepherds," who were tasked with tracking down students (or their parents) who didn't show up for class.

Students who attend the four-week program have raised their reading scores by 50 percent. But there are also intangible benefits, thanks in part to the nontraditional classroom setting and the program's emphasis on recognizing the success of its students. Every year the academy holds a celebration at the Civic Hall Performing Arts Center to give medals and certificates to students who complete the academy. Parents are invited, and the program's motto – "Readers are Leaders" – is celebrated by all.

Starting its fifth year, the program is now jointly funded by the district and serves as a model for other cities trying to combat summer learning loss.

STRATEGIES

- Launched the Third Grade Reading Academy to benefit struggling readers
- Assigned volunteers to track down students who did not attend summer classes
- Academy program has led to a 50 percent boost in reading scores for participants