

Midland Five-year-olds Jump Into Kindergarten The Legacy Center for Student Success Offers Program to Area Children

“Shake, shake, shake your sillies out!”

To the sounds of loud up-tempo music, approximately 90 very energetic Midland five-year-olds started the day at Longview Elementary School by singing and literally shaking their “sillies” out as they participated in the Jump Into Kindergarten (Jump) program that was offered to incoming kindergarteners of the Midland Public Schools by The Legacy Center for Student Success (TLC). The program ran July 31 to August 18, five hours per day, five days per week.

“Jump is a fast-paced experience that moves from one element of physical learning to another in rapid succession,” said Richard Dolinski, president and founder of TLC and coordinator for this pilot program. “Children work in groups in playful activities to develop certain physical elements such as balance, laterality, tactile touch, eye-hand coordination and the like. Each exercise is carefully designed to not only address a particular physical dimension, but also to teach a cognitive or behavioral item that improves school success.”

One example of such activities involves taping large (approximately 10 foot) letters of the alphabet on the floor. The children crawl, skip, hop and walk sideways, forward, backwards, etc. over the letter. “This physical encounter, supplemented with conventional methods, results in demonstrable learning of the alphabet. A similar approach is used for the numbers from one to ten,” said Dolinski.

The Jump curriculum, developed by Dr. Thomas Johnson of Albion College, emphasizes learning through physical activity and purposeful play. Dr. Johnson often points out “If they learn it through play, it’s there to stay.”

The Jump staff consisted of five kindergarten teachers and ten paraprofessionals from the Midland Public Schools. They were trained by Dr. Johnson in his methodologies. They led the children in the various activities throughout the three weeks of Jump.

Pre and post assessments of various cognitive and behavioral outcomes were performed with each child. “Preliminary analysis indicates significant improvement in every category assessed,” said Dolinski. “These children also will be compared with their peers who did not participate in Jump for the next four years using standardized evaluations of student performance.”

Each participant received an “I’m jumping into kindergarten” shirt, a Jump water bottle and loads of good memories to last a lifetime.

One parent summarized her child’s experience right after the program by saying, “Thank you for the wonderful three-week experience! My daughter has learned so much. She

can now recite and write the alphabet, count by fives and tens, and jump across the room on one foot. She has also learned to be much more confident. She started the program a very shy five-year-old, but by the second week she blossomed! She has made new friends and, according to her teachers, participates much more in class. The Jump staff was fantastic and we are certain that our daughter's entrance into kindergarten will be a successful one. Thank you for a fantastic experience."

The Jump program is being funded for the next three years by generous grants to TLC from four Midland foundations: The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation, The Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation, The Charles J. Strosacker Foundation and the Midland Area Community Foundation.

Plans are underway to offer Jump next summer to five-year-olds scheduled to begin kindergarten in Fall 2007 at Bullock Creek, Coleman and Meridian schools. The following year, the Jump program is scheduled to return to the Midland Public School System.

The success that this particular program has shown is generating interest in Saginaw as well. The Saginaw Public School System is currently looking at the possibility of extending the Jump program to their five-year-olds next summer.

The Legacy Center for Student Success was founded in July 2004, as a fund within the Midland Area Community Foundation, to research student learning. TLC has established two funds at the Midland Area Community Foundation -- TLC Project Fund for current operations and TLC Endowment Fund for ongoing future support. If you would like to make a contribution, you may make a gift online at www.midlandfoundation.org.



Learning the alphabet is easier when a child encounters letters physically. Each day of Jump Into Kindergarten, children walked, skipped and interacted in various ways with two letters of the alphabet.



Learning the letter "T" was never more relaxing---an exercise in spatial and body awareness.



The children are working with a tactile touch and balance exercise, while their giggles say they're having fun.