

Thursday, June 24, 2010

## Pilot program pays students for summertime reading

by Megan McKeever | Staff Writer



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To keep children learning during summer break, five Prince George's County schools in partnership with a Bowie nonprofit organization are offering cash for reading.

The "5 Gets you 25" summer reading program — available for 8- to 11-year-olds at Columbia Park Elementary in Landover, Rogers Heights Elementary in Bladensburg, William Paca Elementary in Landover, Carmody Hills Elementary in Capitol Heights and Cooper Lane Elementary in Landover Hills — offers students \$5 per book, up to a total of \$25, for reading selected books and completing a book report each.

At Columbia Park Elementary, 82 students had signed up for the program as of June 17, the last day of school for students, said Principal Michelle Tyler-Skinner.

"Learning takes place every day, even during the summertime," Tyler-Skinner said. "We're encouraging students to read 20 to 30 minutes a day."

The program, which kicked off June 15, will accept the first 500 students who send in a book report. Students can find the rules of entry as well as selected books online at [lakefoundation.org](#).

Age-appropriate book selections have been chosen for the fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders including popular picks like Jack London's "The Call of the Wild" and Lois Lowry's "The Giver." The follow-up book report is meant to aid student's reading comprehension and writing skills, and asks students to identify things such as their favorite character and what they learned from the book.

Charles G. Davis, president of the Bowie-based Luke Foundation, the program's sponsor, said the age range was selected to help students build core skills as they transition from elementary to middle school. Davis, a father of six, came up with the idea for the program after starting a similar game with a co-worker's child, who he noticed was often bored in the summer.

"So I thought let's see if this concept works on a larger scale," said Davis, who leads the organization that focuses on engaging under-served youth.

Davis said he hopes to expand the program to seven schools in the fall and nine by next spring, creating a partnership with a local bank in which students can deposit their money.

Tayo Fawibe, 10, a rising sixth-grader at Columbia Park who had enrolled in the program, said she will be visiting her school on Wednesdays to check out books from the school library, write book reports and ask staff for help.

Tayo's mother, Abinbola Fawibe of Cheverly, said she is happy the school system is providing incentives to keep students active over the summer.

"It's really going to help improve her reading, and I am going to help her in reading the books and defining words," she said.

The program is the first of its kind in the county, and if successful will be used as a model for future summer programs, said school spokesman Darrell Pressley.

The participating schools, all of which are Title I, meaning 40 percent or more of the school's population falls below the poverty level, were chosen by the school system based on academic need and poverty levels, Pressley said.

Also, each of the schools has a summer school program, making the school library and staff accessible to students throughout the summer.

"Research shows the lower-income students are more susceptible to losing reading skills," said Brenda McLaughlin, vice president of Baltimore-based Community Activities for the National Summer Learning Association. "During the school year, lower-income students make similar gains in reading as their middle-class peers, but during the summer the middle-class students are continuing to progress, but lower-income students fall behind."

The lack of progression in low-income students is tied to less access to reading materials, cultural experiences and summer vacations, she said.

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