

Edgewater students get summer reading help



Joshua McKerrow - The Capital

Oran Czajkowski reads from a worksheet in the Voyager Reading program at Edgewater Elementary. About 80 percent of county elementary schools run the program during the school year, but only Edgewater has continued it over the summer.

By ELISABETH HULETTE Staff Writer
Published August 12, 2007

When Marilyn Wirth asked her third-grade students at Edgewater Elementary School a question Friday about a story they had just read, she heard only silence.

Then Oren Czajkowski, a 9-year-old boy with sandy blonde hair, a black Spider-Man T-shirt and untied shoelaces, grinned.

"Let's look back in our story, shall we?" Oren asked, and dove back into his book to find the answer.

In a classroom usually closed up for summer, where old bedsheets have been draped over tables to protect books and files, Oren and five other rising third graders at Edgewater have spent their summer answering such questions. For forty-five minutes a day since July 9, they have been taking reading classes in Edgewater's Voyager Passport reading program.

About 80 percent of county elementary schools run the program during the school year, but only Edgewater has continued the program over the summer, said Kim Callison, coordinator of elementary reading and language arts for the school system.

"We saw success with it immediately," said Barry Fader, the principal at Edgewater. Continuing the program over the summer for about 20 first- through third-grade students cost about

\$2,000, and the investment has paid off, he said.

"The kids who did this last summer really had a jump on other kids" when school started last fall, he said.

In fall 2006, the six students in Ms. Wirth's class read at just five words per minute, far below normal for their grade level, and were placed in Voyager Passport.

Now they read at 70 to 80 words per minute, not yet at their grade-level standard of 90 words per minute, but far better than a year ago, said Ms. Wirth, a special education instructional assistant who teaches the class.

And because the classes end just a week before school starts, the students retain much of what they learned during the school year.

"The kids come back to school a week later, so they don't have that brain drain over the summer," said Nancy Kruger, a reading teacher at Edgewater. "Our kids aren't going to have that summer loss."

Voyager makes for a fast-paced class, without a lot of "down time," Ms. Callison said.

Ms. Wirth's students sound off with a list of vocabulary words, reading them one at a time, and then moving on to reading a story out loud.

Before long, the students are lined up to leave.

Oren will be in West Virginia this weekend on a family reunion, and he plans to bring along Dr. Seuss's "The Cat in the Hat" and "Green Eggs and Ham."

He likes reading and doesn't mind coming to school in the summer, he said.

"You come here, get out your book and sound the words out, and you'll read better and better every day," he said.