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Council of North America

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Reading Recovery Salutes Outstanding Principals



Nancy Simpkins
Westwood Elementary School
Fairview, TN

Reading Recovery has produced good results at Westwood Elementary, reports Principal Nancy Simpkins. “We’ve only had maybe three kids test below first grade when they’re done with Reading Recovery,” she said. “That’s almost a 100% success rate.”

Located outside Nashville, TN, Westwood Elementary was opened 6 years ago and is now full. There are close to 450 students in grades K–5, with four first-grade classrooms of 15 students each. About 38% of students are on free or reduced-price lunch, which is a high percentage for the district. The surrounding community is strong and tightly-knit, with long-time residents who have passed their property down through generations. All the students go to the same middle school and the same high school.

Teacher Collaboration is the Key to Success

The key to success is the collaboration between the Reading Recovery teachers, the first-grade teachers, and even the kindergarten teachers, Simpkins said. “Our Reading Recovery teachers are part of the first-grade team. We have other interventions, and Title I is one piece of our literacy program, but Reading Recovery is one of the most successful because of the teacher training.”

“I just want to say up front that my two Reading Recovery teachers are awesome teachers,” she added. “I’ll mention them by name, Ms. Marilyn Godwin and Mrs. Vicky Roark, because they are the reason we are fully implemented and the reason the kids are doing so well.”

One of the elements that Simpkins values in Reading Recovery is that it establishes a common language between teachers. “I’m thrilled with the level of communication. They’re all really strong. All this is research-based training, and these are very highly qualified teachers. Title I permits targeted assistance. Reading Recovery is one piece of a big pie, and it lays the foundation for future grades.”

For Simpkins, though, the source of Westwood Elementary’s success is easy to pinpoint. “We look at what’s best for children, and these teachers are so well-trained and child-centered—they are why it works!”