

# Give Me 5: Building the Foundation for Academic Success

by Pamela L. Astbury W. S. Cohen School

For the past three years, the Sixth Grade Team at the William S. Cohen School has led the way in developing programming to enhance students' use of the *Agenda Book*, a highly successful organizational and home school communication tool. Through daily interactions and a variety of reinforcements, teachers have provided students with the strategies necessary to utilize the *Agenda* for short and long term goal setting, time management, and task completion. This intensive work in grade six provides for the development of the *Agenda Book* "habit" which is then encouraged by teachers at the seventh and eighth grade levels.

In addition to these strategies, the *Agenda* includes exposure to the major components of the *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. As a teen version of the best selling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, the *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* provides a foundation for helping students transition into middle school, respond positively to expectations and challenges, develop healthy relationships, and build personal goals.

As we looked forward to the 2004-2005 school year, the Sixth Grade Team considered ways to make an

already solid program even better. Confident that all students could benefit from more direct instruction in using the *7 Habits* to positively impact their daily lives, the team determined that a weekly lesson that was common to all classrooms would provide a more solid platform on which to build student understanding. Corinne Foley, who is working with Mrs. Astbury as a Guidance Intern this year, created

*"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."—Hellen Keller*

a resource notebook containing a variety of supplemental lessons and materials for their use. During study halls, Mrs. Foley has assisted teachers in the presentation of their weekly lessons, which have focused on the first 3 habits: Be Proactive, Begin with the End in Mind, and Put First Things First. Students have had opportunities to discuss the relationship between their daily school lives and the futures they envision, creating personal mission statements and discovering the importance of prioritizing versus procrastinating.

Yet one of the most powerful

components of our expanded program is the *Give Me 5* program. Intended to be easy to remember as well as effective at providing for optimal classroom learning, the *Give Me 5* program helps students remember five keys to success. For every class, every day, students must: 1) bring their *Agenda Book*, 2) bring their completed homework, 3) bring a writing instrument, 4) bring the books for the subject, and 4) write

all their assignments in their *Agenda*. Each week teachers report the results to the Guidance Office, which tallies the information from every class, whether it be physical education or math, art or English. Students who have been 100% on track for the week qualify for upcoming after school activities, such as a Make Your Own Sundae Party, Board Game events, and Cooperative Games. Over December and early January, 84 students were 100% on track with their *Give Me 5* requirements during a three week interval, and participated in our Ice Cream Party. Many, many others fell short by only a forgotten pencil or

book.

Our teachers have been amazed by the way all students have been adjusting to the challenging expectations of Sixth Grade in general and the *Give Me 5* guidelines in particular. When a student comes to class without a pencil, missing the necessary book, or without homework, his ability to participate fully in the class is compromised. Each interruption for a student to return to her locker disrupts the flow of instruction, and *Give Me 5* has provided a simple motto that all can use to come prepared. Parents have been extremely supportive of our efforts, signing *Agenda Books* on a regular basis, attending Open House presentations in the Fall, and reviewing newsletter updates on a monthly basis.

Naturally, our goal is to reach a 100% success rate for our Sixth Grade students. But this goal is about so much more than having 147 students all participating in an event. Our goal is academic success for every student, a puzzle that our team is working continuously to piece together. Through our daily efforts, evaluations, and revisions, we feel confident that we will meet our goal.

## School Wide Silent Reading A Success

By Jen Wellington

*"...if children . . . start reading for pleasure, . . . good things will happen."*

In *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*, Stephen Krashen asserts "What the research tells me is that if children . . . start reading for pleasure, . . . good things will happen." This has become the case at the James F. Doughty School, where a school-wide silent reading period was instituted this year as part of its reading improvement plan. Although a common occurrence in individual classrooms and the elementary grades, a formal block of time, scheduled daily, was new to this middle school.

Planning for this addition began during the 2003-04 school year. Faculty and administration sought ways to positively affect student achievement as well as actively engage students in the process of reading, whether for recreation or part of a classroom assignment. After much discussion and organization, by the opening day of school in September, the plan was in place.

A regularly scheduled, ten-minute block of time was set for staff and students to read. All participants were encouraged to select readings of personal interest and could bring their own materials or select from the print-rich environment in the school. In addition to an active, busy media center, classrooms had available a variety of paperbacks, magazines and

newspapers. With a committed staff eager to make this an integral part of each day, and an appreciation on the part of the students, this silent reading period has already had a positive impact on the school environment. Combined with other strategies instituted by the reading committee and teachers, improvement in student performance is anticipated. As the year continues, all results will be examined to determine the effectiveness of these programs and to explore additional possibilities.

A survey of students and staff conducted in late fall produced encouraging information. The faculty reaction to this reading time was overwhelmingly supportive. Student responses were equally positive. Many felt that the ten-minute block was "just right," and comments such as "love it" and "it's great" were found on many replies. Although some sixth, seventh, and eighth graders availed themselves of the print materials in the classrooms, the majority of students reported bringing in or reading their

own books and magazines.

It appears that the silent reading period has found its niche in the James F. Doughty School. It assists in the creation of a school climate where the discussion of books and literature is an everyday occurrence. The educational benefits also appear clear, as ". . . free voluntary reading will help build language competence and contribute to intellectual growth, which will make literature more comprehensible and meaningful." (Krashen, p.85) Perhaps the best endorsement came from an eighth grade student, who found the reading time "good, because it lets your brain relax for ten minutes."



Nate Frazier, Caleb Ford, Robby Clark, Seth Perfito and Seth England settle down with a good book.