

Deb Ashley (Pre-K Fours Director) and Jenny Neal (Pre-K Fours Teacher):

Now that you have been directing and teaching within the Pre-K Fours program with the new structure, what do you feel is one of the advantages of the program?

To name just one advantage is difficult. We feel that some of the advantages of the program are:

- Financial assistance for families who may not have been able to afford a quality Pre-K experience for their child(ren).
- Program evaluations, PQA (*Program Quality Assessment*) rating, and QRIS (*Quality Rating Improvement System*) ratings demonstrate that we have a high-quality program.
- Strong relationship-building with families through the two home visits we do each year and the family involvement pieces that we offer.

Mrs. Peters would also like to add that the PQA is a state-assessed *Program Quality Assessment* conducted by Early Child Specialist, Kristi Carambula. Very recently we learned that our program here at Climax-Scotts is one of the highest rated in our county!

You also have a Pre-K Threes. What are the advantages of sending a child to both?

The advantages of sending a child to both Pre-K 3's and Pre-K 4's are the continuity of education. A lot of the routines, structures and skills of the 3's program carry over to the 4's program, and those routines, structures and skills are carried over into Kindergarten. The 3's program is also a good way for new families to be introduced to the community and the Climax-Scotts education system.

Allison Charles (Kindergarten Teacher):

Our early elementary reading scores are improving significantly, especially since we have had training in some new early literacy strategies and routines. How do you feel these types of strategies assist students with reading? What are some key components of the literacy strategies?

The strategies we use during our literacy block are useful tools the kids can immediately transfer into reading and writing. These routines are repetitive and learned quickly, which enables students to spend more of their working memory and brain power on the task instead of thinking about what it is that you are asking of them. This creates a deeper connection to the sounds that letters make and how we can use and manipulate them to create words. Because these routines are predictable and practiced daily, I feel they begin to build an understanding faster than previous strategies allowed.

We are certain to engage the five big ideas of early literacy in our daily routines. These ideas are phonemic awareness, alphabetic principal, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary. As a whole class, we engage in phonemic awareness activities to begin our literacy block. During this time, students practice differentiating sounds in a word, hearing similarities and differences between words and sounds, stretching words out, and breaking them apart. We then practice some letter/sound correspondence, often focusing on a letter or two a week and reviewing letters we have already learned. We utilize these letters

to begin reading as soon as possible! As soon as we know a few letters (including a vowel) we are reading! You wouldn't believe how many words you can make with just 4 or 5 letters! Because we start showing the students they are readers right away, they realize they are capable of becoming readers and quickly find a love for books.

Once we have shown students how to "blend words" to read, we start working on the fluency piece. Fluency is reading without sounding labored. We practice this through the use of sight words and words that are easily decoded (sounded out). We have weekly phonics books, along with a variety of other tools, to help encourage fluency and voice when reading. We practice comprehension and vocabulary daily throughout all subjects. We follow explicit routines to teach vocabulary, so just like the other literacy strategies, students are using their brain power and working memory for the skill at hand (understanding the vocabulary) and not using that capacity trying to figure out what it is you want from them.

As part of our literacy block, these techniques help students to leave Kindergarten confident, encouraged, and ready to face the challenge of 1st grade!

Miranda Vorce (*Kindergarten Teacher*):

As a new teacher, what are your thoughts about teaching reading now that you have been trained in the literacy strategies here at Climax-Scotts?

Dr. Seuss said it well "The more your read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." Reading opens doors for learning in all subjects; therefore, we know it makes sense to put a strong focus on developing these literacy skills in Kindergarten. The literacy strategies here at Climax-Scotts allow students to grow in depth by implementing consistent daily routines. Students learn to hear all the sounds in words, break apart words to hear the sounds and then put the symbol (or letter) to that sound to form words, which transfers over to them to grow as writers. It is very exciting to watch students become eager to learn more - more letters, more sounds, more rules - and then using these in their reading and writing in all subjects at school and at home too! As a new teacher I am thankful to have such a wonderful support team here at Climax-Scotts, they are happy to pass on knowledge of these literacy strategies to staff, students and families so that we can all share in growth of our students!

Jill Woodworth and Lori Boomershine (*First Grade Teachers*):

As two veteran first grade teachers, how is teaching reading different now compared to the last ten or more years? Do you feel the changes lead to more positive results?

As two veteran first grade teachers, we have seen many changes in the ways that reading has been taught. We have taught reading through whole language as well as through the use of thematic instruction. Our most recent change has been the shift back to phonics and decoding. We have very specific and intense segmenting and blending routines that we do on a daily basis. This is easy for our first graders because these routines have already been established in Kindergarten. We feel that this really strengthens the first graders' basic reading core skills that they will need when attacking unknown or multisyllabic words.

Teri Peters (*Principal*):

What improvements have you seen throughout the early elementary grades since your staff has begun working with the new literacy strategies and routines to teach reading?

Nearly all of Climax-Scotts Kindergartners are able to meet the reading standards and benchmarks thanks in large part to the literacy strategies and routines that we were trained in and began using mid-way through 2012. The students have fun while learning to read and we are able to send them to first grade with a higher starting point than in the past. This assists with a smoother first grade year where there are even higher benchmarks to meet and more intense expectations for reading. We know from research that students need to be able to read well by the end of their first grade year in order to experience more success throughout their entire academic career. Teaching specific literacy strategies and routines is one way we accomplish this.

We also provide daily para support for a 45 minute block after whole group learning time in literacy. Our paras have also been trained in the strategies and routines and are essential to providing specific skill work within small groups so all students can succeed.

How are these student groups structured?

Students are screened at the beginning of the year through our DIBELS test and then we respond to that data by identifying necessary key skills that may be lacking. Students are then grouped to work on these specific skills and they move into other groups as they progress. The teachers and para support personnel continue to monitor classroom student progress to be sure every child is working on the individual skills he or she needs. We also have a part-time Title 1 teacher who works with students who need more intensive work. She and I work together, along with the staff, to frequently analyze the student data so we can respond to needs as they arise.

In summary, why should families make Climax-Scotts their children's school?

In addition to the fantastic start children have here with reading, which is essential for life-long learning of any subject, we are also a *Positive Behavior Intervention Support School* (PBIS). The entire campus staff, including bus drivers, cafeteria workers, para support personnel, office staff and teachers have been trained to utilize several strategies throughout the day to motivate our students to make good choices and earn privileges! Our belief is that making good choices throughout the entire campus allows teachers to spend more time on instruction and less time on negative behaviors. This allows for increased learning, positive relationships and a more positive attitude about wanting to attend school.

To learn more about how we can help your child have a fantastic school experience, call the Elementary office to set up a tour at 269.497.2101

Climax-Scotts is the Right Choice!