

Schools celebrate learning approach

Committee says Project Child shows promise

By RICK GUINNESS
HERALD STAFF

NEW BRITAIN — Based on the school curriculum committee's assessment of a new teaching program, some 675 city students in six schools are in for a great experience in the classroom.

Rather than go through school one teacher at a time and one subject at a time, Project Child — the acronym stands for Changing How Instruction for Learning is Delivered — involves teams of three teachers, referred to as "clusters," working together with a group of students.

The program, which was implemented at the beginning of this school year, was imported from the Institute for School Innovation, an organization in Tallahassee, Fla.

Each teacher specializes in reading, writing and math, with social studies and science woven into what they read, write about and calculate.

Standardized achievement tests like the Connecticut Mastery Test will determine how well the program works over time.

But anecdotally, it is already a success in the city:

"It's an awesome program," said Lyn Channey, the district's facilitator for Project Child, who gave the committee its first update on the program at the committee's Tuesday night meeting.

Channey, who taught middle-school math and science in the district for 13 years and served as a resource teacher for the past two, said she has seen some dramatic changes in students with the advent of the program.

She talked about one parent of a student at Lincoln, who had a terrible absenteeism problem.

Channey said that "last year she had

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to beg, plead, and fight with her first-grade child to go to school. This year as a CHILD second-grader, she gets up before the parent and can't wait to go to school."

At another school, she said a parent had a child "who had experienced working in groups to do activities in preschool, and really grew, however, he had a difficult time in kindergarten because he did not do things the same way."

With the CHILD program, she said, he is engaged and the difficult behaviors he exhibited last year are almost gone.

The new program has a reading station, teaching station, computer station and a challenge station.

Students in Project Child are given "passports," which they need to go from station to station within the classroom.

In the passport packet, student write down what they did, on what day, what books they read and by what author. There is also a section called "station reflection," in which students may comment.

There is a huge section in the passport that asks students what they think. And on what day they thought it.

Board member Pat Coyle said

she wondered how the students could handle that level of detail in filling out the documents.

But Channey said they love it.

The "traditional open classroom" as she referred to it, did not have the same level of accountability.

Activities now involve teams. Students still whisper to each other, but now they are helping each other to fill out the activities card.

Committee Chairwoman Sharon Beloin-Saavedra said Project Child is expected to enhance student performance, and praised Channey for her enthusiasm and hard work, saying she understands why the superintendent gave her the job.

"The benchmarks are the same," Beloin-Saavedra said. "This is a different instructional modality. Kindergartners might be working with colors; another would be computer-based learning. All would be building the skill you are trying to infuse."

Vance is the only city school using the program for all grades.

Lincoln is doing a bilingual cluster in grades 3, 4 and 5.

Jefferson is the only school that has a Project CHILD kindergarten.

For details about Project CHILD, log onto www.ifsi.org.

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