Learn for Life is a United Way of Portage County internal program that partners with Portage County school districts to provide second and third grade students with tutors on a regular basis to increase reading achievement. Reading proficiency is a critical marker in a child’s future success. From Kindergarten through third grade, children learn to read and from fourth grade and on, children are reading to learn. If a child is having difficulties reading by the end of third grade, they will have a harder time learning to extract and analyze new information and expand their vocabulary in fourth grade. During the 2019-20 school year, Learn for Life’s tenth year of programming, trained volunteer reading tutors worked with second and third grade students at 13 schools throughout Portage County: Almond-Bancroft Elementary, Rosholt Elementary, St. Bronislava Elementary, Tomorrow River Elementary, as well as all nine Stevens Point public elementary schools. The dedication of the teachers and tutors takes us a step closer to improving reading proficiency among second and third grade students and promoting a lifelong love of reading.

According to the Kids Count Profile through The Annie E. Casey Foundation, in 2019 64% of Wisconsin fourth graders were not proficient in reading.

https://www.aecf.org/m/databook/2020KC_profile_WI.pdf
Grow Your Library Award

As a way to acknowledge their time, talent, and dedication to their students, Learn for Life presents teachers involved in the program with the Grow Your Library Award. During year ten, Lisa Wirkus was awarded $250 to spend on books to grow her classroom library. Teachers are nominated by tutors and selected at random. This year, the award was sponsored by CoVantage Credit Union.

Lisa Wirkus
Kennedy Elementary

Program Statistics

LEARN FOR LIFE THROUGH THE YEARS

Learn for Life was piloted at Rosholt Elementary School during the 2010-11 school year with two classrooms, 11 students, and six tutors. During the 2019-20 school year, Learn for Life was in 54 classrooms, served 184 students, and had 96 substitute and once-a-week tutors. Once-a-week tutors work one-on-one with their students for a total of one hour a week from October to May. Substitute tutors fill in when the once-a-week tutors are unable to make their scheduled time.
Program Outcomes

Learn for Life is truly a collaborative effort between dedicated teachers and tutors who together build a foundation for each student to grow and succeed. Due to COVID-19, the tenth year of Learn for Life programming was cut short. However, the program was able to gather assessment score results that reflect students’ growth from September of 2019 to March of 2020.

Outcome One: Second Grade

Outcome one is that second grade students in the Learn for Life program who take the DRA Assessment will reach spring level benchmark (grade level proficiency) of 28 and/or increase at least four DRA levels. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is a standardized reading test used to determine a student's instructional level in reading.

From the assessment scores that we were able to receive before COVID-19 developed, we saw that 42% of the second-grade students in the Learn for Life program, increased at least four levels and/or reached their spring level benchmark. If second grade students were able to finish the entire Learn for Life program year, we would have expected to see a larger growth closer to 90% achievement.

Outcome Two: Third Grade

Outcome two is that third grade students in the Learn for Life program who take the MAP Assessment will meet their projected growth and/or increase at least 12 RIT points. MAP, or the Measure of Academic Progress, is a computerized adaptive test constructed to measure student achievement and support direct measurement of academic growth and change. MAP scores are reported on a RIT scale with a range from 100 to 300. Projected growth is individualized and dependent on what level the students start the school year at. When scores are collected at the end of the year, school administrators let us know which students met their projected growth and which ones did not.

From the assessment scores that we were able to receive before COVID-19 developed, we saw that 62% of the third grade students in the Learn for Life program who took the required assessments met their expected growth and/or increased at least 12 points. If third grade students were able to finish the entire Learn for Life program year, we would have expected to see a larger growth closer to 68% achievement.
Summer Sizzle

For the fifth summer, as a way to promote literacy to youth in Portage County during the summer months, Learn for Life held five Summer Sizzle Reading Series Events. New in 2019, events were held at Boys and Girls Club of Portage County sites for club members. Each event was sponsored by an area business or community member who selected a representative to read a book aloud. Children received a free book to help grow their at-home library and participated in literacy related activities. Summer Sizzle sponsors included: AIG, CoVantage Credit Union, Marten Machining, Skyward and JR & Heather Wynne.

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