

Students boosts literacy skills through summer program

According to site coordinator Kelly Taksier, the SAIL (Summer Adventures in Literacy) program at Idylwild Elementary School benefits both little students and big students.

The 'little' students are the nearly 40 incoming 2nd- through 4th- graders who are spending five weeks this summer boosting their reading skills. The 'big' students are the graduate students from the University of Florida College of Education who are helping them do it.



“Our goal is to give children the support they need to become proficient readers,” said Taksier, a graduate assistant with the SAIL program. “We also want the instructors to develop their abilities to teach every child to read—not just some students, not just most students, but all students.”

Each morning in the SAIL program is spent on academics, primarily reading. Students work with their instructors one-on-one, in small groups, and sometimes independently at various literacy stations to practice the skills they’ve been taught. The activities are customized to meet each child’s individual needs. The morning also includes breaks for recess and snacks.

Afternoons are spent on less structured but still intellectually stimulating activities, including arts and crafts, hands-on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) activities and field trips to places like the Museum of Natural History and the Santa Fe Teaching Zoom.

“Those trips are important because they build our students’ knowledge so that when they’re reading a text they are bringing that prior knowledge to the table,” said Taksier.

Instructor Hannah Kastensmidt, who will start teaching full time at Irby Elementary school in the fall, says she and her fellow teachers have worked hard to make the program fun and engaging for students and has seen them make great progress.

“They have so much more confidence in themselves and their abilities,” she said. “They’ll be able to take that confidence and the skills they’ve learned here and translate them into success during next school year.”

This year’s SAIL program is a collaboration between Alachua County Public Schools and the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI), based in the College of Education. UFLI provides the instructors, all of them teaching interns in the master’s year of their five-year teacher preparation program. The instructors are supervised by UF faculty members.

The district is providing space and supplies on Idylwild’s campus, transportation for students, meals and afternoon supervision and activities.

Dr. Holly Lane, associate professor of special education at UF, oversees the SAIL program. She and ACPS School Superintendent Dr. Carlee Simon worked together to bring the program to Idylwild this summer, and they hope to expand it to other district schools and include district teachers as instructors. SAIL has previously operated out of UF’s PK Yonge Laboratory School.

(More)

“The gains we see during the short summer program are nothing short of remarkable,” said Lane. Children learning many new schools and have multiple opportunities for practice. Likewise the instructors develop expertise that will serve them well in their careers.”

One of those instructors is Areliz Portalatin, who has been tutoring some of the SAIL students remotely. She says the program has been a great learning experience for her as well as her students.

“I’m learning to engage students in a multitude of formats, and that’s making me stronger as an educator,” she said. “Teaching does not have to be only one set thing. There are so many new and interesting ways to fill our students’ brains with information.”

Dr. Simon says UFLI services will be provided during the upcoming school year at all ACPS elementary schools in kindergarten through second grade. She and Dr. Lane are also looking forward to expanding the SAIL program to other district schools next summer and including ACPS teachers as instructors.

“This is a win-win for the district in so many ways,” said Dr. Simon. “Our students are strengthening their literacy skills while our future teachers are developing the skills they need to help more students become proficient readers.”

#####