

## Both sides benefit from peer tutoring program in area schools

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BY ALEXANDRA MESTER / THE BLADE



Bedford High School tutor Noah Bock helps Jackman Road Elementary first-grader Damien Hawkins develop his reading skills during a Students for Other Students tutoring program on Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2019.

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For young students working to master the early concepts of reading and math, a little help can go a long way.

The Students for Other Students, or SOS, nonprofit program provides grants for schools to hire teens to tutor their younger peers. Toledo-area businessman and philanthropist Ford Cauffiel created the nonprofit 28 years ago, and it now serves students in districts across northwest Ohio, and a few in Illinois and New York.

"It's a pretty simple thing just to pay children to teach other children," Mr. Cauffiel said. "And it makes a big difference in somebody's life. I have thousands of letters from parents, guardians, and children. It's changed the lives of a lot of children."

The nonprofit gives out \$150,000 per year to participating school districts, and more than 20,000 tutors and tutees have been impacted, Mr. Cauffiel said. Tutees benefit from increased one-on-one attention to help them improve in reading and math, while tutors gain empathy, communication skills, and life experience.

"It's a double-hit program," Mr. Cauffiel said. "It's an advantage for everyone involved."

Bedford Public Schools in Temperance has participated in the program nearly every year since 2005. Eight high school students visit first and second-grade classrooms at Jackman Road Elementary School four times a week for an hour to work with children teachers have identified as needing a boost.

Rachel Pearch, a first-grade teacher, said the tutors help students who might be a bit behind close the gap and catch up to their peers. It's particularly important for those children who may not have enough support at home.

"I'm only one person and I have anywhere between 24 and 27 students at a time," she said. "For them to have that one-on-one with each kid is really beneficial, especially for those students that are struggling. ... That gap is just going to widen if they don't have support."

Julie Eaton, reading specialist at the school, oversees the SOS program and a \$5,000 grant that pays student tutors minimum wage. She said the program receives 20 to 25 high school applicants each year, who must submit a letter of interest and a resume.

"For many of them, it is their very first work experience," she said. "So they're learning valuable lessons, too."

One tutor is assigned to each classroom. They work with multiple students one-on-one or in small groups in the final hour of the elementary school day.

Senior Noah Bock is a tutor in his second year in Mrs. Pearch's classroom. He said he's learned to be adaptable to tutees' individual needs from day to day, and enjoys seeing the difference he is making.

"Last year, I had a student who couldn't identify letters," the Bock youth said. "We practiced and practiced and practiced. By the end of the program they were able to say all the letters and do the sounds and form words. I saw the progression and how they improved. I had a part in that, and it felt really good."

Last week, tutors were reading books and playing math games with their tutees. Second-grader Kinley Henderson said her tutor helps her with adding and subtracting as well as sounding out and recognizing words.

"She helps me with work that I don't get right," she said. "Last time, she helped me with a game with math. And we read books that I pick out."

The student's improvement is tracked through existing assessments throughout the school year. While every student's progress varies, Ms. Eaton said there's a noticeable positive impact for SOS tutees.

Mrs. Pearch said tutors also are role models for their tutees, and it's been evident that the Bock youth's influence for some of her students that do not have such a role model elsewhere in their lives has helped in other areas.

"I've seen it help not only academically but behaviorally as well," Mrs. Pearch said.

Jim Gault, chief academic officer at Toledo Public Schools, said the SOS program there notably improves students' relationships with their classmates.

"We see a couple of things. First, some academic improvement, primarily around their grades," he said. "The other thing we see is a sense of belonging and a lot of peer relationship improvement. Our younger students are being influenced in a positive direction by their eighth-grade counterparts."

Ms. Eaton said simply having one more person showing interest in tutees' academic progress and celebrating successes with them is a powerful motivator.

"Seeing the children's faces light up when that tutor walks in the room, it's almost like they adopt that person as theirs," she said. "They're very excited to show them what they know."