

CCGA Students Spend Semester Tutoring at Goodyear

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College of Coastal Georgia middle-grade education majors Justin Thrower and Katie Warren join fellow classmates in tutoring Goodyear Elementary School fifth grade students.

Bobby Haven/The Brunswick News

When Libby Burton began tutoring a fifth-grader at Goodyear Elementary nearly three months ago, the shy student refused to read out loud.

“At first, I would read a couple of pages and then ask if she wanted to read, and she would say no, and I’d read a little bit more,” said Burton, an education major at the College of Coastal Georgia.

But after a semester of one-on-one teaching, Burton said the student is now insisting to read out loud.

“Her confidence in reading improved tremendously with us just doing that,” Burton said.

Burton is among a group of CCGA middle-grade education majors who have spent the past 12 weeks tutoring fifth graders at Goodyear. Their professor, Ron Reigner, said they work individually with the students to improve their literacy skills. They help the fifth-graders with reading comprehension, vocabulary development and fluency.

“The two things that are most improved in the group, semester after semester, is the fluency piece,” Reigner said. “The other thing is the affective dimensions of teaching, which is motivation, attitudes and self efficacy — how they feel about themselves as readers. Their confidence level goes up.”

This is the third year of CCGA’s partnership with Goodyear for the tutoring program, Reigner said, and it has benefited both the college and the elementary students.

The college students are all seniors who will be graduating next month and beginning careers as teachers. This experience provides them crucial training before running their own classrooms, Reigner said.

“They really develop a professional eye and a professional ear,” he said. “You want the child to feel what good reading feels like. It’s a little tricky, because ... they want to read stuff that’s of interest to fifth-graders. So you have to find easy texts that they can be successful with.”

The college students work with the same fifth-grader all semester, and at the beginning the tutors learn what kind of books their student is interested in reading. Then they bring those materials to read together.

The tutors would record their students reading out loud and play the recordings back for them. Reigner said this teaching technique quickly improves a students’ reading fluency.

At the end of the semester, the tutors put together a case study assessing their students and the improvements.

Burton said the tutoring program has prepared her to successfully work with students one-on-one, as a professional teacher.

“You can teach a whole class and maybe a third of them will get it, then you have to break it down a little more so that three-fourths of the class will get it,” she said. “But you’re always going to have to do a little bit of one-on-one with somebody in your class, so getting the practice here shows me that while I can teach the whole class, I can also do it one-on-one.”

But the most important lesson Reigner’s students are trying to share is how beneficial a love of reading can be. Students who read will see success throughout their time in school and later in life, he said.

“The research plainly shows that kids who are avid readers, their vocabulary goes up, their spelling skills go up,” he said. “I think every teacher’s job is to do two things — to teach kids how to read and to teach kids to want to read.”