



Business	Education	Government	Health	Living	News	NonProfit	Region/State	Sports	Voices	
--------------------------	---------------------------	----------------------------	------------------------	------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------	------------------------------	------------------------	------------------------	--

[Home](#) [Education](#) [Overcoming a poverty of words, Covington kids improve skills with free web-based literacy program](#)

Overcoming a poverty of words, Covington kids improve skills with free web-based literacy program

Sep 22nd, 2016 · 0 Comment



By **Vicki Prichard**
NKyTribune reporter

While studies show that socioeconomic factors can have significant impact on a child's vocabulary, and ultimately, their success in school, a whole new equalizer may well be found in the palm of a child's hand.

Covington children are demonstrating that access to achievement can be found on a Smart phone and iPad.

In December 2015, Covington Independent Schools, along with help from generous members of the community, launched [Footsteps2Brilliance](#), a free web-based literacy program app that is loaded with more than 1,000 children's books, nursery rhymes, songs and educational games.

The program, which is available to children in preschool through the third grade and can be accessed on cell phones, computers, iPads and other mobile devices, is free to families in Covington with children in preschool through third grade.

Children, as young as two-years-old, can log into Footsteps2Brilliance and create their own passwords from a series of pictures. From there, they have access to the engaging programs and activities. Their work is uploaded so educators can track activities and progress.

Instant impact

The program's impact was immediate and evident. Covington Independent Schools Assistant Superintendent Charlene Ball says that when they launched the program they set a goal for a million words to be read.

Two weeks later the kids had already met that goal so they aimed higher.

Since the program began, Covington children have read 139,190 books for a total of 37,739,348 words, and logged 9,836 hours on the community-wide initiative. The school district, along with private and parochial schools and daycare centers throughout Covington celebrated the children's progress Thursday evening at the Life Learning Center in Covington.

"We are pleased with the numbers that we are seeing," says Suzanne Thompson, elementary director of Covington Schools and coordinator of Footsteps2Brilliance for the district. "But we want to make sure that as many Covington children as possible are taking advantage of this program. That's another reason we are meeting – we would like to engage businesses, churches, and other organizations to help us spread the word to families about this wonderful program. Our goal is for all Covington children to use this free app."

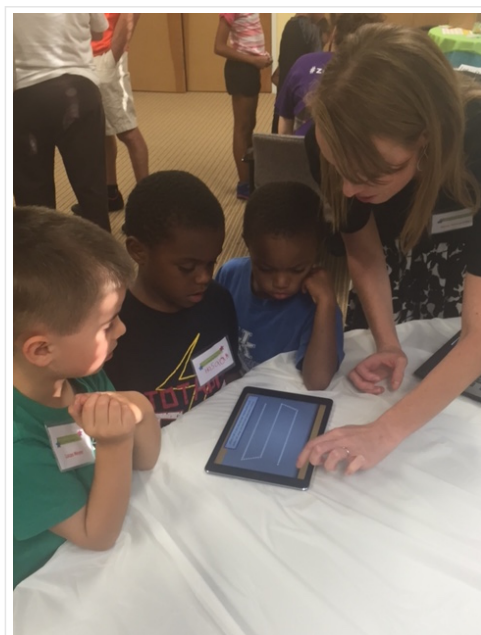
Of the 1165 students in kindergarten through second grade, Ball says 75 percent of those students are at or above benchmark.

"That means that they are ready to go, they are ready to learn," says Ball.

According to the data analysis for Footsteps2Brilliance in Covington Schools, more time on Footsteps2Brilliance resulted in more students at or above the benchmark levels.

Data shows that 42 minutes per week on Footsteps2Brilliance resulted in 78.4 percent of the students at or above the benchmark; 20 minutes or more resulted in 63.2 percent; 10 minutes per week 59.8 percent; and three minutes per week at 54.3 percent.

"When you see sort of the difference by the amount of time — and remember, that's 42 minutes a week — so it's not the reading program, it's the enrichment program, and you see the dosage of that, that's a very powerful message that says, 'Hey, if I'm a teacher, if 42 minutes makes that much of a difference to my kids, I'm finding



time for my kids,” says Rick Hulefeld, founder and executive director of Children, Inc., a community partner for the program.

Latonia Elementary kindergarten teacher, Katy Goodridge, with, from left to right, Lucas Meyer, Hassan Dukes, and Hezeikah Dukes on the Footsteps2Brilliance app being used in Covington Independent Schools.

Equalizer app

The goal of Footsteps2Brilliance, says Ball, is to equalize early learning so that when children come to them in kindergarten and at James E. Biggs preschool they are ready to learn.

Basically, says Ball, the program is an opportunity for students, on grade level, to have an interactive platform where they can see words and pictures and put them together, operating at their own pace.



Five-year-old Lucas Meyer demonstrates Footsteps2Brilliance for grandfather Joe Meyer's edification.

“It does everything from putting words and sounds together, all the way up to giving you opportunities to create your own books,” says Ball. “So, it’s that whole gamut of literacy acquisition.”

Ball explains that research shows that if students have a vocabulary deficit that it will impact learning throughout school.

“If they struggle with vocabulary words, they struggle with school in general,” says Ball.

Most vulnerable are children from low-income families who have a significant gap in their vocabulary skills compared with peers from more affluent families, a deficit that can be daunting.

Ball pointed to research that shows children in upper class families exposed to 11.2 million words, children in middle class working families to 6.5 million words, and children of poverty to 3.2 million words.

According to the study, which tracked those children for the next four years, the children of upper class families were exposed to 45 million words, children of middle working class families to 26 million, and children of poverty to 13 million words.

Enthusiastic learners

Footsteps2Brilliance is considered a breakthrough in early learning, accelerating student achievement by combining the impact of mobile gaming technology with current cognitive research. The innovation leverages mobile technology, allowing Footsteps2Brilliance to take traditional print material and engage children through digital interactivity. Children become active learners, teachers instantly can track progress, and parents have

the tools for enjoyable, everyday learning.

Ball says it’s exciting to watch the children work in literary stations, excited and engaged.

Katy Goodridge, who teaches kindergarten at Latonia Elementary School, sees the enthusiasm it spurs in her students.

“It’s a great way for students to get exposure to lots of books, and it’s very interactive and motivational,” she says. “The students want to play right away and they’re excited to talk about it.”

Goodridge says she gave parents a program demonstration on her classroom’s Smart Board so they could see the games and do them at home.

Accessible to all

As for families who don’t have access to tablets or mobile devices, Children, Inc. has that covered.

Children, Inc. has tablet libraries at all of their centers where families who don’t have access to technology at home can borrow the tablet at no cost and take them home.

“We have tablet libraries so that our families who don’t have access to technology at home can rent them — completely for free — borrow them from our centers, take them home at night so they have access at home,” says Elizabeth Fricke, Children, Inc. director of marketing and public relations.

Fricke says they’ve found that some families have smart phones but no data plans, so they can download materials at Children, Inc. centers and take it home to use.

