Measuring Success

LFLA Recognized for Outstanding Student Growth



King F. (3rd grade) working with math manipulatives

When Lift For Life Academy received its Annual Performance Review (APR) last fall, one factor stood out above all others: students had made significant growth in both Math and English Language Arts (ELA) over the prior year.

Student growth made LFLA one of Missouri's most effective schools serving low-income students, according to Saint Louis University's Policy Research in Missouri Education (PRiME) Center.

The PRiME Center focuses on Missouri schools educating the largest percentages of low-income students in its report "Beating the Odds: 4th Edition," which was published in January. LFLA's elementary school received an award from PRiME for placing among the top high-poverty schools statewide whose students demonstrated the most growth in English Language Arts during the 2023-24 school year. The Academy received a second award for "EleMiddle" (K-8) schools whose students demonstrated the most progress in Math.

Most discussions about standardized test scores focus on the percentage of kids who score in one of four categories: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient and Advanced. Students in high-poverty, low-performing districts have traditionally scored in the lowest categories, for reasons that include instability and stress in their home lives, and limited access to early childhood education.

But the test scores themselves do little to demonstrate whether a school is making a difference for its students, said Collin Hitt, executive director of the PRiME Center. The more accurate measure of a student's success is not a test score but how much growth the student demonstrated, Hitt said – a statistic that is less prominent in the data, and harder to tease out. "If we care about how much distance a kid covered over the course of a year, you look at growth," he said. "Then you're able to see who really had the best year."


PRiME CENTER
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This PRiME Center Growth Award is presented to

Lift For Life Academy Elementary
Lift For Life Academy

for exceptional student growth in English Language Arts during the 2023-24 school year

Scan the QR code to learn more about PRiME Center Growth Awards

Collin Hitt, Ph.D.
Executive Director
PRiME Center

Hitt said that the center hopes to build engagement around the idea of student growth by recognizing and rewarding schools that are doing well, and encouraging schools to share the factors that are making a difference for their students so that other schools can replicate their results.

Last year, LFLA adopted new curriculum materials for math and reading, and put in place different strategies to support students who were several years behind grade-level expectations. The school started grouping students primarily by skill level, not by grade level. Teachers then focused on building foundational math skills for older students, such as multiplication and division, rather than presenting only grade-level math concepts. This was a significant change in approach that particularly benefited LFLA's middle school students, who were in early elementary grades when the Covid-19 pandemic required schools to rely on virtual learning. The school also expanded its team of math and ELA interventionists to work individually and in small groups with the students who were furthest behind grade-level expectations.

Those efforts continue this year, along with dedicated intervention time for both math and reading across the entire elementary school, and a new reading intervention program for 5th and 6th grade students.

Students in grades 3-8 take the Missouri assessment tests for math and ELA. The 2024 test results showed LFLA students in all tested grades making growth from the previous year that rated either "on track" or "above average" in both ELA and Math. Bruce Hansel, an educational expert who analyzed student performance at LFLA, said that the Academy's students made nearly 1 ½ years of growth in reading and literacy during a single school year, and nearly that much growth in math. Mr. Hansel's report also noted that students continue to score closer to grade-level standards the longer that they attend LFLA.

Dr. Katrice Noble, LFLA's Deputy Director, said that the test results – and the acknowledgements from the PRiME Center – show that the Academy's strategies are helping students make significant gains.

"It's a source of pride and excitement to get this award, because we don't tend to get this kind of recognition," Dr. Noble said. "We know the hard work we've done. To know that others are seeing this work, too – it's a great feeling. But I'm always looking at what we need to do next."


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