
IPS Launches Online Literacy Tutoring Program for First Graders

By Shawnta S. Barnes – February 20, 2017



The Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center supports five schools in IPS: Daniel Webster School #46, Stephen Foster School #67, Wendell Phillips School #63, William Penn School #49 and George Washington Community High School. One need expressed by these schools to Mary Rigg is the need for tutors for their students. A member from the Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center saw a presentation about TutorMate at a conference held by The Points of Light, a nonprofit dedicated to volunteer

service. Districts across the nation who are using TutorMate have seen literacy growth in their students which led to TutorMate being presented as an option for students in IPS.

TutorMate is an online tutoring program focused on improving early literacy outcomes for students in low-income communities with the hope that first graders will learn how to read. Innovations for Learning, the national education nonprofit behind TutorMate, partners with corporations and organizations to find volunteers to tutor students online during 30-minute sessions. Online tutoring gives the tutor the flexibility to tutor whenever he or she has a quiet space and internet access. Each tutor is paired with a first grade student and they spend time reading and playing games to build phonemic awareness and vocabulary skills. At the end of the year, first graders participating in the TutorMate program meet their tutor in person at a culminating event to celebrate their success and literacy gains.

Currently, TutorMate is being used in first-grade classes at Christian Park School #83

Daniel Webster School #46, Phalen Leadership Academy at George H. Fisher School #93, Wendell Phillips School #63, and William Penn School #49 with the hope of TutorMate being implemented in more schools next year.

Students enjoy it. One IPS first grader said, "I like TutorMate because my tutor talks to me, reads with me and is friendly."

Christy Chappell, Indianapolis Program Ambassador for Innovations for Learning, helps set up the TutorMate equipment and is a resource for teachers. She also reviews statistics and data each week to ensure high fidelity.

"I love watching the interactions between the tutor and the student and seeing the joy on the kid's face. I am not even sure my kids get 30 minutes of uninterrupted time one-on-one with an adult and these kids get that and that's valuable."
Sarah Bernstein, first-grade teacher at Wendell Phillips School #63, also believes TutorMate is a good support for her classroom.

“TutorMate is exciting. It is a way to engage my students. Tutors can message me to give updates. I like that I can change the level. This allows me to adjust the reading stage my student is working on.”

Elizabeth Odle, Director of Community School Collaboration for Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center shared she was glad Mary Rigg was able to help bring TutorMate to schools in IPS. She wants to make sure it is a good fit.

“In the long term we want to ensure it continues to complement the current curriculum in place and the knowledge learned transfers over when students are assessed over skills in their classrooms.”