



## **In The Classroom: 'Literacy Lounge' at Jackson's Frost Elementary School provides cozy space to boost reading skills**

By [Leanne Smith | lsmith12@mlive.com](mailto:lsmith12@mlive.com) on January 29, 2013 at 9:30 AM

JACKSON, MI – Jeanie White admits she probably reads at least a hundred books a year. This year, some of those books will have colorful pictures, rhyming words and stories that hopefully foster a skill and love of reading in young children. “Reading opens doors,” White said. “I think anything you can do to help kids early with reading is great.”

An employee at Jackson’s CP Federal Credit Union, White is among a host of volunteers mentoring students in Frost Elementary School’s “Literacy Lounge.” The literacy lounge is part of [Energizing Education](#), a new program that strives to have all students reading at grade level by third grade in an effort to boost their success the rest of their lives. The 19 students in the program thus far have been picked by their teachers. For 30 minutes once a week they come to the lounge and work with a volunteer mentor. “I like it,” said first-grader Crystal Martin, 8. “I like reading long words and sounding them out because I know it will help me read a lot.”

With their mentors, students hang out in the literacy lounge’s five “cubbies” to read books, sound out words and spell out words with magnetic letters on a board. Furnishings for the room were purchased with a \$1,500 donation from the Stanton Corp., which owns local Wendy’s restaurants. The students also write in a journal to tell about the books they’ve read to gauge their comprehension. Mentors fill out worksheets that tell if the book was good for the child’s reading level, or if it was too hard or too easy.

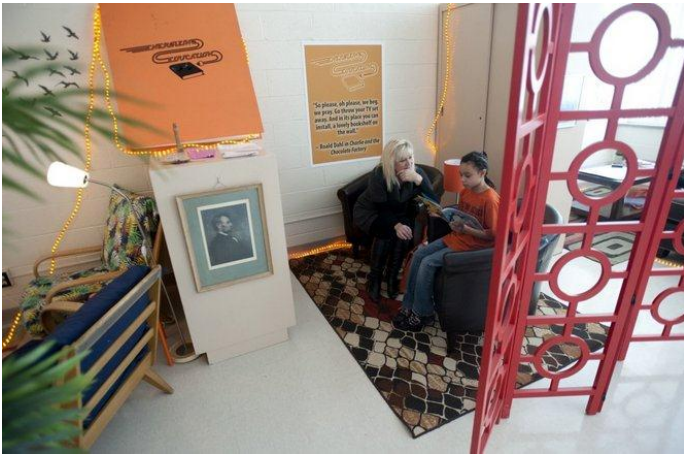
“It’s really important to get kids early so they are reading at grade level by third grade,” said Asa Fleming, a Jackson County Intermediate School District literacy specialist who’s working with the program. “The best way to become better at reading is to read.” Students in the program also are taken by bus three days a week after school to St. John United Church of Christ, 801 Mechanic St. in Partnership Park for added reading support from high school students and Community Action Agency teachers. Family nights that encourage parents to read with their children and teach them how to get involved with helping their kids read better also are scheduled throughout the year.

Energizing Education is funded through one of 10 \$125,000 grants being offered by the Consumers Energy Foundation for projects throughout Michigan as part of Consumers Energy’s 125th anniversary celebration. Matching funds were provided through the United Way of Jackson County, Jackson Community Foundation and several other community organizations.

The program is being piloted at Frost, with hopes of spreading it out to all Jackson County schools in the future. “We continue to do fundraising to make that happen,” said Kriss Giannetti, Energizing Education grant coordinator. “We’ve had other districts come to see what we’re doing with parent involvement because that part is so important.”

Volunteers are still needed for the mentoring program. People can sign up or find out more by visiting [www.energizingeducationjackson.org](http://www.energizingeducationjackson.org) and the [Energizing Education Jackson Facebook page](#) or calling Giannetti at 841-2148.

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Kriss Giannetti, grant coordinator for Energizing Education, reads with Crystal Martin, 8, a first grader, in the Energizing Education literacy lounge at Frost Elementary School in Jackson on Thursday afternoon. (J. Scott Park | Mlive.com)



Literacy Specialist Asa Fleming reads with first grader Yesenia Carreon, 6, in the Energizing Education literacy lounge at Frost Elementary School in Jackson on Thursday afternoon. (J. Scott Park | Mlive.com)



Crystal Martin, 8, a first grader, reads in the Energizing Education literacy lounge at Frost Elementary School in Jackson on Thursday afternoon. (J. Scott Park | Mlive.com)



First grader Yesenia Carreon, 6, reads with Asa Fleming in the Energizing Education literacy lounge at Frost Elementary School in Jackson on Thursday afternoon. (J. Scott Park | Mlive.com)



Sara Calkins, an Americorps volunteer, points to a letter as she works with Illyria Smith, 6, a first grader, in the Energizing Education literacy lounge at Frost Elementary School in Jackson on Thursday afternoon. (J. Scott Park | Mlive.com)



Sara Calkins, an Americorps volunteer, works with Illyria Smith, 6, a first grader in the Energizing Education literacy lounge at Frost Elementary School in Jackson on Thursday afternoon. (J. Scott Park | Mlive.com)