**Accelerated Reader at St. John**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Why does St. John use Accelerated Reader?**

We use this program to enhance our reading instruction in an effort to meet the individual interests and reading needs of a diverse student population. Students also enjoy using Accelerated Reader as a reading incentive program and a means to track their own individual progress.

**Is Accelerated Reader a comprehensive reading program?**

While AR does help us meet national, state, and FVL Schools standards, it cannot stand alone as a comprehensive reading program. Your child has regular reading instruction that includes instruction in reading strategies, genre, story structure, non-fiction, phonics and structural analysis, critical reading/thinking skills, reading across content areas, literary techniques, and many other areas including how reading corresponds with listening, speaking, and writing skills. AR is designed to assist students in increasing reading comprehension at their individual level using books that they choose.

**Why not just let students read these same books without the Accelerated Reader program?**

The program has tools to assess reading level, select appropriate books, and to track reading progress. Accelerated Reader technology allows teachers to track reading ability, reading comprehension, and what students read in ways that would not be possible without the aid of this computer software based approach. It offers a quick and easy way for teachers to hold students accountable and to identify reading difficulties that may otherwise go unnoticed in a traditional reading program.

**I’ve heard conflicting information about the effectiveness of AR. How can we be sure it’s helping our students?**

A simple answer to this would be that Renaissance Learning can prove it and so can we. The makers of AR and other outside organizations have done numerous studies to support its claims which is why it is used in over 25,000 schools. Just like purchasing a gym membership will not make you physically fit, just purchasing AR for use in your school will not make your students great readers. It’s how you use it and implement it that ensures its effectiveness. St. John teachers fully implement the program now and are continuously looking for ways to improve our implementation. There are a number of ways to implement the program and each individual school has to decide what works best for their needs.

**How is the program working for our students?**

St. John students have been using this program for many years. In the eleven years that I’ve used the program I’ve seen marked improvement in how we’ve implemented the program and marked improvement in student reading abilities. Overall St. John students score well above national levels and above synod levels on standardized reading tests. Students who come to our school below level in reading have made great gains with our comprehensive reading program that includes Accelerated Reader. It is not feasible for all students to read above grade level due to learning difficulties or other situations, however the vast majority of our students read at or above grade level by their 8th grade year. All students have opportunities for success with this program and are well equipped for success long after they have left St. John.

**What is St. John doing to improve this program?**

This past summer Mrs. Ellingboe worked on reorganizing books and taking an inventory of what we have. She is also working on a new incentive team based program for our school. Mr. Hagenow is working with an AR representative to upgrade our software to a version that will allow students access to over 150,000+ reading practice quizzes compared to the 3000+ we offered before. I’ve recently completed graduate level coursework researching best practices in AR and implementing them in the classroom. In this course, I had to show evidence of research and that I could improve what I do in the classroom in ten weeks. I was assessed on my research, plan for improvement, implementation, and how the students progressed. I was able to show that the students made great gains in the short time period and the professor even commented that we have an “amazing number of high level readers” at our school. I’m eager to share what I’ve learned about AR best practices and continue working collaboratively with the other St. John staff members.

**What can parents do to support our program?**

You can check that your child is bringing home appropriate reading material and reading that book for at least 20 minutes each day. You should also view your child’s reading assessments and reading practice quiz reports. Your child’s reading assessment will tell you your child’s reading level and what level of books they should be reading. Their reading practice reports will tell you how they are scoring on the books they have read. Your child is making optimal gains if they are scoring 85% or above on their tests and meeting their point goal. Your child’s teacher will keep you informed if interventions are necessary and you shouldn’t be afraid to notify your child’s teacher if you have questions or concerns.

\*You will also want to keep reading the “Cry of the Cardinal” updates since we will soon be changing how we do things with AR. We will soon have some very exciting options beyond what we currently offer with AR. More information will be coming out as it becomes available.