

# Basic Skills Bulletin

News for and about the largest network of alternative learning centers in the nation



## A Basic Skills Model

### Myers Middle School, Savannah, GA Self-Contained, Multi-Grade Classroom

*This article is part of an on-going series about the learning centers and sponsoring organizations that make up the U.S. Basic Skills Network. Other articles in the series can be found on our website at <http://www.usbasics.org>.*

Myers Middle School serves about 850 students from inner-city neighborhoods and two barrier islands in the eastern section of Savannah, Georgia. The school, which is part of the Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools, began using the U.S. Basics Learning System in 1991. Today, operating in a brand new building, Myers provides the system's individualized, self-paced learning through a self-contained, multi-grade classroom.

In that classroom, teachers John Bragg and Kathy Stanley have become accustomed to watching change occur before their eyes. Working with an average of 25 sixth, seventh and eighth graders a semester, their goal is to help the students gain the academic

skills and self-discipline needed to go back to their regular classroom, to stay in school, and to graduate. "We have a mission," Bragg explains, "helping these kids get through whatever problems they're having. It's tough out there, outside our gates."

The students are recommended to attend the multi-grade classroom by the team leader for each grade, and recommendations can be made at any point during the school year. Those referred have reading and math skills below grade level, miss school frequently, and often disrupt their classroom when they do show up. In age, students range from 12-16 years old.

Recommendations are reviewed by the school administration, led by Principal Mickie Roby, and if approved, sent on to Bragg. Each student is then tested and put on a waiting list until a space becomes available. Last semester, for example, 15 students were promoted to their regular classrooms.

#### **Brand New and Out of Room**

John Bragg had the luxury of designing the classroom space for the new school building. The room is larger than other classrooms in the school, with a half wall creating two learning areas, one for math and history and one for reading and language arts. There are plenty of bookshelves for the system's binders and instructional materials, closets provide storage space and the room is wired for the system's computers.

The school's administration provided funds to update the reading, language arts and math instructional software and to add Skills Bank 4. The classroom is equipped with 6 new or slightly used computers.

The school day is organized into four blocks, each 70 minutes long. In the multi-grade class, the students are divided into two groups. One group works in the math/history area for two periods while the other works on reading and language arts, then they switch places for the last two periods.

The only problem, according to Bragg, is that they anticipated serving 20 students, but new families have moved into the district since the building was completed and the school quickly became overcrowded. Principal Roby is hoping to hire another teacher for the multi-grade program.

### **A High Comfort Level**

Bragg and Stanley establish an environment of respect in the classroom by showing students they are serious about their success. Stanley joined the multi-grade classroom in 1999. Although she admits that the U.S. Basic Skills Learning System was an adjustment from her previous teaching experience, she finds the individualized, self-paced approach very useful in teaching math. “They can begin at a level where they can be successful,” she says, “and once they feel comfortable with us, will come to us when they need assistance.” She also enjoys working with the same students for most of the day, finding the students and teachers become a family.

The teachers also have an open door policy for their students’ parents, guardians and other important adults. Once a youngster enters the multi-grade classroom, the teachers get in touch with his or her family inviting them to come in any time to talk about any concern they may have. The teachers have found they are able to talk with parents and monitor the students while the students are working on their individual lessons.

Bragg, who has used the U.S. Basic Skills Learning System since it was introduced at Myers, teaches reading and language arts in the multi-grade classroom. He believes this approach is making a difference, and that it shows in how the students are behaving, improving and learning. The rapport he and Stanley establish with their students lasts beyond the time a young person spends in their classroom. Both are good at dealing with “at-risk” kids and are often called when there’s a problem on campus.

*For more information about the multi-grade classroom at Myers Middle School, contact John Bragg at (912) 303-6600 or at [john.bragg@savannah.chatham.k12.ga.us](mailto:john.bragg@savannah.chatham.k12.ga.us)*