

Mrs. Jamison:

I am excited that the Parish is considering buying a new curriculum to accompany our Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum (LCC). The LCC works well but there are key components missing that a supplemental curriculum would cover. As advised, I spoke with my team members and we decided to look into a curriculum commonly referred to as Leaps and Bounds. It is used in our Head Start programs here in Shreveport.

### **Curriculum Overview**

The correct title of this program is **L**anguage **E**nrichment **A**ctivities **P**rogram (LEAP) and was developed by Southern Methodist University's Learning Therapy program in response to a request from the Texas Instruments Foundation (TIF) in 1993 to create a language-rich pre-reading program for children at the Margaret Cone Head Start Center in Dallas, Texas. Although this program was designed to be used in Head Start programs, it also works well in the Pre-Kindergarten classroom. Its target audience is three to five year olds. I would like to note that for at least the past 10 years, Louisiana and Texas have used it in all of their Head Start programs as their main curriculum. LEAP is an early literacy program with a scientific research base. LEAP is a multisensory, enriched language program which provides daily lesson plans to be used throughout the year. The teacher guides are key components of LEAP. The guides contain daily lesson plans, and are designed to emphasize the areas of receptive and expressive language, phonological awareness, knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, basic concepts, pre-writing fine motor skills, and math and science concepts, thereby increasing the children's chances for success in kindergarten.

### **Publishers Research**

Nell Carvell is the author of the Language Enrichment Activities Program (LEAP). Ms. Carvell has over thirty years teaching experience including classroom, teacher training, and individual therapy with children with learning differences. For the past ten years, with funding from the Texas Instruments Foundation, Head Start of Greater Dallas and the Texas Education Agency, she has directed a research study using the LEAP - Cone Center model. This program is currently being implemented in Head Start and Early Childhood programs in urban and rural settings across the United States. Before Mrs. Carver published her curriculum, she conducted her research at the Margaret Cone Head Start Center located in Dallas, TX. The study was conducted over a years' time and test results were compared to those of two years prior to the LEAP curriculum being introduced. After a full year of LEAP at the Cone Center and kindergarten at Frazier Elementary, the children's median scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) improved approximately 30 – 40 percentile points. The students are monitored until 3<sup>rd</sup>

grade and research showed that Cone children still score well above the national norm on state and national standardized tests.

### **Supporting Research**

The LEAP curriculum has been researched by many school districts, companies and people. It has gained national recognition through the *No Child Left Behind* act enacted by the Bush administration. Laura Bush was so impressed with the curriculum that she made a special visit to the Cone Head Start Center. LEAPS was granted a 3 year trial run at the Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten classes located in the Tuscaloosa, Alabama school district. The district was interested in finding a curriculum that would teach the students while allowing them to have a more hands on approach. The program was sponsored and monitored by the *Success by 6* program. There were 6 classrooms selected across the district, the other centers maintained the districts' current curriculum. After the trial run was completed and the research compiled, the results showed a significant improvement in the students' vocabulary and print awareness skills compared to the classes that did not use the LEAPS curriculum. The school decided to adapt the curriculum into all of their Head Start and Pre-Kindergarten classrooms. The What Works Clearinghouse also conducted a study that included the LEAP curriculum. The study involved curriculums that were used as interventions to decrease the district's student dropout rate. The study focused on three outcome domains: staying in school, progressing in school, and completing school. There were 22 dropout prevention interventions that qualified for review. Of these, twenty-two programs, only eleven met all of the studies standards without reservation and LEAP was one of the eleven.

### **Pros**

The curriculum has several aspects that would make it ideal to use in our classrooms here at Sunset. The program is based around building childrens' vocabulary using read alouds from books and the language is extended across the curriculum because it is incorporated throughout the daily activities. The LEAP curriculum comes complete with a vast amount of books. The collection includes books that are multi-cultural, fiction, non-fiction, and even includes books that teach about emotions, and building character. Each lesson is designed to teach across the curriculum so it touches base with literacy, math skills, science and/or social studies each day.

### **Cons**

There are a few major problems I have encountered using this program. The daily activities can sometimes be strenuous and require a lot of materials that can be hard to obtain. Many of the lessons require several volunteers and this was hard to accomplish due to low parent participation. The lessons are also based on the fore-thought that all

students have the prior knowledge needed to understand the concept or skill being taught. It requires that students use their higher-order thinking skills but doesn't take in consideration that some students are still building their understanding and need lower level activities to build their cognition in the subject matter.

### **Personal Opinion**

The program is designed to nurture the whole child by stimulating their physical, academic, creative, social and emotional growth. I have personal experience using this curriculum because of my years spent as a Head Start teacher. When I first started my research, it was with the thought that LEAP may have redesigned their curriculum and adjusted some of the loop holes but, I was wrong. In my opinion, I do not think that Sunset should purchase this curriculum for our Pre-Kindergarten classrooms. I hope that this information will be useful when you meet with the other principals to discuss which curriculum to purchase. I have included several websites that will provide more information on the Language Enrichment Activities Program if needed.

Educationally yours,

Kimberly M. Goree  
LA4 Pre-Kindergarten Teacher

Enclosure: Additional resources

Enclosure: Websites used to research LEAPS curriculum.

<http://leapsandbounds.org>

<http://leapsandbounds.org/tuscaloosa.htm>

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/dropout/topic/>